UNDER SAIL

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UNDER SAIL

BY

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I

"The longer I live" said Nichols from the darkness of his corner "the less of difference I see between the East and the West. I've been listening closely to you fellows. We are fond of saying that we don't understand the Oriental; but, let me ask you, do we fully understand our best friends—even ourselves? Whose fault is it? Or, failing to understand the Oriental, is it logical for us to consign him to a different sphere of human nature? Of course, it's the easiest way to dodge the real answer...."

The old *Omega* had drifted that morning past Green Island, dropping anchor a little later among the fleet off Stonecutter's; and after dinner, moved by a common impulse, we had called our sampans and joined Nichols under her spacious after awning. There, with the broad land-locked harbour of Hong Kong under a half moon reflecting the perfect outline of the Peak, talk had wandered lazily along the range of our shipping activities, to reach at last, as it always did in such company, that world-old problem of the races of men.

"I think I know the race of Chinamen" Nichols went on, while grunts of assent from several quarters of the deck gave testimony to his reputation. "Oh, yes, I know them. They are made of flesh and blood, if you'll believe me; they eat with their mouths, and think in the recesses of their skulls, just as we do. They marry, beget children, and pass through life. They love, fight, strive for gain, sin, suffer, learn lessons, regret, make restitution, are tempted by devils, struggle and triumph, or give up in despair, and finally die with their years and their secrets on their heads. The same old conscience pursues them. Yes, they are eaten up, like us, by the savage and devastating contest with self, the flesh and the spirit striving for the mastery; and out of the contest, like fire struck from clashing swords, come the sparks of ideas, of aspirations, of creative efforts, of wonder and joy, pain and fear, of all the infinite play of this star-spangled life of ours against the soft darkness of the unknown sky.... You fellows have been discussing only superficialities. At heart, you and the Oriental are the same. The Chinese are romantic, I tell you; they are heroic, they are incorrigibly imaginative. You think not? Let me tell you a tale"

Suddenly Nichols laughed, a snort that might have been of self-derision. "You won't be convinced" he chuckled "I see it already. You'll derive from this tale, no doubt, only further confirmation of the unlikeness you imagine. So be it. I merely warn you not to be too sure. Strip my friend Lee Fu Chang naked, for instance, destroy and forget about that long silken coat of his, embroidered so wonderfully with hills and trees and dragons, dress him in a cowboy's suit and locate him in the Rocky Mountain region of fifty years ago, and the game he played with Captain Wilbur won't seem so inappropriate. It's only that you won't expect a mandarin Chinaman to play it. You'll feel that China is too old and civilized for what he did...."

II

"Some of you fellows must remember the notorious case of Captain Wilbur and the ship *Speedwell*" Nichols began "For years it was spoken of among sailors as a classic instance of nautical perfidy; and this was the port, you know, where Wilbur first brought the ship after he'd stolen her, and settled down to brazen out his crime. But few men have heard how he lost her in the end, or why he disappeared for ever from the life of the sea.

"Perhaps I'd better refresh your memories; let's go back a matter of forty years. Captain Wilbur was a well-known shipmaster of those palmy days. He had commanded the *Speedwell* for a decade, and possessed a reputation for sterling seamanship and unblemished integrity. His vessel was one of the finest moderate clippers ever launched on the shores of New England. But she was growing old; and Wilbur himself had suffered serious financial reverses, although this fact wasn't known till after the escapade that estranged his friends and set our little world by the ears. He seems to have been something of a gambler in investments, and by bad judgment or ill luck had brought his fortune to the verge of ruin if not of actual disgrace. This, so far as I know, stands as the sole explanation of his amazing downfall. There was nothing else the matter with him, physically or mentally, as you shall hear.

"Out of a clear sky, this was what he did: he deliberately put the *Speedwell* ashore in Ombay Pass, on a voyage home from Singapore to New York with a light general cargo, and abandoned her as she lay. I say he did it deliberately; this is the common surmise, and subsequent developments lend point to the accusation. It may have been, however, that she actually drifted ashore, and that he didn't try at the time to get her off. Whether he planned the disaster, or whether he succumbed to a temptation thrust in his face by the devil of chance, makes little difference. His plans were deliberate enough after the event.

"Within a month after sailing for home, he was back again in Singapore with his ship's company in three longboats and a tale of a lost vessel. There he remained for three months, cleaning up the business. No breath of scandal was raised against him; Ombay Pass on the turn of the monsoon had caught many a fine vessel before this one, and the account rendered by his officers and crew was straightforward and consistent. The *Speedwell*, according to the official record, had drifted ashore in a light breeze, before the unmanageable currents of that region, and had lodged on a coral reef at the top of the tide in such a position that she couldn't be got off. It was another case of total loss of ship and cargo; in those days there were no steam craft in the East to send on a mission of salvage,

and the Eastern Passages were forbidden hunting ground. What they caught they were allowed to keep, with no words said and the page closed. The insurance companies stood the strain, the ship's affairs were settled without a hitch, and the name of the *Speedwell* passed simultaneously from the Maritime Register and from the books of her owners in America. Captain Wilbur let it be known that he was going home, and left Singapore.

"It was his remarkable destiny to be the revealer of his own perfidy; he made no bones about the job. Instead of going home, he went to Batavia, and there hired a schooner and crew with the proceeds of his personal holding in the *Speedwell*. This schooner and crew he took immediately to Ombay Pass. They found the ship still resting in the same position. What they did there must remain a mystery; I have the tale only in fragmentary form from the Lascar who was serang of Wilbur's native crew.

"He, it would seem, was overawed by the extent of the engineering operations in which he participated; his description partook of the colour and extravagance of a myth. Alone in distant waters they had wrestled like heroes with a monstrous task; day had followed day, while the great ship remained motionless and the elements paused to observe the stupendous effort. They had unloaded the cargo: they had sent down the top-hamper and rafted it alongside; they had patched and pumped, and Wilbur himself had dived in the lower hold and under the bows to place the stoppers in their proper position. So far as I can reckon, it took them a couple of months to get her off; but, by Jove, they floated her—a magnificent feat of sailorizing. Then they loaded the cargo again, and came away.

"When Captain Wilbur appeared one morning off Batavia roadstead with the *Speedwell* under top-gallantsails, towing the schooner, it was the sensation of the port; a sensation that flew like wildfire about the China Sea, as it became clear what he intended to do with her. For he proposed, incredible and unaccountable as it seems, to hold the ship and cargo as salvage; and nothing, apparently, could be done about it. She was actually the property of himself and the Lascar crew.

"The crowd alongshore, everyone interested in shipping, of course turned violently against him; for a time there was wild talk of extra-legal proceedings, and Wilbur might have fared ill had he attempted to frequent his old haunts just then. But he snapped his fingers at them all. He found plenty of men who were willing to advance him credit on the security of the ship: he bought off his crew with liberal allowances, took the *Speedwell* to Hong Kong and put her in drydock, and soon was ready for business with a fine vessel of his own. Well, he knew that personal repugnance wouldn't be carried to commercial lengths; that he and the ship, by cutting freights a little, could find plenty to do. As for the rest of it, the moral score, he seemed cheerfully prepared to face the music, and probably foresaw that with the passage of time he would be able to live down the record.

"The old *Omega* and I were down the China Sea on a trading voyage while these events were taking place. When we got back to Hong Kong, Wilbur had already sailed for Antwerp, leaving his story to swell the scandal and fire the indignation of the water-front. I heard it first from my friend, Lee Fu Chang.

"'An extraordinary incident, is it not?' exclaimed Lee Fu in conclusion 'Extraordinary! I am deeply interested. First of all, I am interested in your laws. Here is a man who has stolen a ship; and your laws, it is discovered, support him in the act. But the man himself is the most interesting. It is a crowning stroke, Captain Nichols, that he has not seen fit to change the name of the vessel. Consider this fact. All is as it was before, when the well-known and reputable Captain Wilbur commanded the fine ship *Speedwell* on voyages to the East'

"'Can it be possible?' said I 'Isn't there some mistake? The man must have the gall of a highway robber! Does the crowd have anything to do with him?'

"'None of his old associates speak in passing; they cross the street to avoid him. He goes about like one afflicted with a pestilence. But the wonder is that he is not disturbed by this treatment. That makes it very extraordinary. He is neither cringing nor brazen; he makes no protests, offers no excuse, and takes no notice. In the face of outrageous insult, Captain, he maintains an air of dignity and reserve, like a man conscious of inner rectitude'

"'Did you talk with him, Lee Fu?' I asked.

"'Oh, yes. In fact, I cultivated his acquaintance. The study fascinated me; it relieved, as it were, the daily monotony of virtue. In him there is no trace of humbug or humility. Do not think that he is a simple man. His heart in this matter is unfathomable … well worth sounding'

"'By Jove, I believe you liked him!' I exclaimed.

"'No, not that' Lee Fu folded his hands within the long sleeves of his embroidered coat and rested them across his stomach in a characteristic attitude of meditation. 'No, quite the opposite. I abhorred him. He seemed to me unnatural, monstrous, beyond the range of common measure. Captain, there are crimes and crimes, and it has been my lot to know men who have committed many of them. There are murder, theft, arson, treason, infidelity, and all the rest; and these, in a manner of speaking, are natural crimes. Shall we define it thus: a natural crime is one which eventually brings its own retribution? Sooner or later, if justice is not done, the natural crime works havoc with its perpetrator; it plagues his conscience, it fastens like a fungus on his soul. Through lust or passion, natural impulses, he has committed error; but he cannot escape the final payment of the price. On the other hand, there are unnatural crimes, crimes for which there is no reason, crimes requiring no liquidation; and there are unnatural criminals, feeling no remorse. Such a criminal, I take it, is this Captain Wilbur, who goes his way in peace from the betrayal of a sacred trust'

"'Aren't you drawing it a little strong?' I laughed 'It isn't exactly a crime…'

"Lee Fu smiled quietly, giving me a glance that was a mere flicker of the eyelids. 'Perhaps not to you' said he 'Fixed in the mind of your race is a scale of violence by which to measure the errors of men; if no blood flows, then it is not so bad. Your justice is still a barbarian. Thus you constantly underestimate the deeper crimes, allowing your master criminals to go scathless, or even, in some instances, to prosper and win repute by their machinations. But, let me tell you, Captain, murder is brave and honourable compared with this. Consider what he did. Trained to the sea and ships, after a lifetime of honourable service to his traditions, he suddenly forsakes them utterly. Because the matter rests with him alone, because there is nothing in it for him to fear, his serenity condemns his very soul. He has fallen from heaven to hell; flagrantly, remorselessly, and without attempt at concealment or evasion, he has played false with sacred honour and holy life. It is blasphemy that he has committed; when the master of the ship is not to be trusted, the gods tremble in the sky. So I abhor him—and am fascinated. He does not speak of his crime, of course, yet I find myself waiting and watching for a hint, an explanation. Believe me, Captain, when I tell you, that in all my talk with him I have received not a single flash of illumination; no, not one! There is no key to his design. He speaks of his ship and her affairs as other captains do. He is a tall, jovial, healthy man, with frank glances and open speech. For all that seems, he might have forgotten what went on at Ombay Pass. I swear to you that his heart is untroubled. As you would say, he does not care a damn…. And that is horrible'

"A little amused at my friend's moral fervour, I adopted a bantering tone. 'Perhaps the man is innocent' said I 'Perhaps there's something unexplained….'

"'You forget that he holds the vessel as his property—the same vessel that he himself ran on shore' Lee Fu reminded me 'You are still thinking, Captain, of violence and blood. No one was lost, no shots were fired … so, never mind. It is not vital to you that a strong man within your circle has murdered the spirit; you refuse to become excited or alarmed … Wait then till actual blood flows'

"'What do you mean by that, Lee Fu? You think…?'

"'I think Captain Wilbur will bear watching. In the meantime, take my advice, and study him when opportunity offers. Thus we learn of heaven and hell'"

III

"A few years went by, while the case of Captain Wilbur and the *Speedwell* passed through its initial stages of being forgotten. Nothing succeeds like success; the man owned a fine ship, and those who did business with him soon came to take the situation for granted. Wilbur made fast passages, kept the *Speedwell* in excellent trim, and paid his bills promptly; rumour of course had it that he was growing rich. In all probability it was true. After a while, some of his old friends were willing to let bygones be bygones; there were many more to whom the possession of a fine piece of property seemed of enough importance to cover a multitude of sins. The new fellows who came to the East and heard the tale for the first time couldn't credit it after meeting Wilbur in the flesh. Little by little one began to see him again on the quarter-deck at the evening gatherings of the fleet, or among seafaring men ashore at tiffin. When, in time, it became unwise to start the story against him, for fear of misconstruction of one's motive, it was evident that he had well-nigh won his nefarious match against society.

"I'd met him a number of times, of course, during this interval, and had come to understand Lee Fu's urgent advice. Indeed, for one curious about the habits of the human species, Wilbur compelled attention. That perfect urbanity, that air of unfailing dignity and confidence, that aura of a commanding personality, of an able ship-master among his brethren, of a man whose position in the world was secure beyond peradventure: all this could spring from one of only two spiritual conditions—either from a quiet and innocent conscience, or from a heart perfectly attuned to villainy. As he sat among us, taking up his proper word in the conversation, assuming no mask, showing no concern, it was with the utmost difficulty that one placed him as a man with a dark past, with a damnable blot on his escutcheon. So unconscious was his poise that one often doubted the evidence of memory, and found oneself going back over the record, only to fetch up point-blank against the incontestable fact that he had stolen his ship and betrayed his profession. By Jove, it seemed fantastic! Here he was, to all intents and purposes a gentleman; a likeable fellow, too, in many ways. He talked well, was positive without being arbitrary, usually had a fair and generous word for the issue under discussion, never indulged in criticism; and above all, damn him, he sustained a reputation for expert mastery over this profession to which he'd dealt such a foul blow.

"'It is a triumph of character!' Lee Fu used to repeat, as we compared notes on the case from time to time. 'I think he has not been guilty of a single minor error. His correctness is nothing short of diabolical. It presages disaster, like too much fair weather in the typhoon season. Wait and watch; mark my word, Captain, when the major error comes it will be a great tragedy'

"'Must there be a major error?' I asked, falling into the mood of Lee Fu's exaggerated concern 'He's carried it off so far with the greatest ease'

"'Yes, with the greatest ease' said Lee Fu thoughtfully 'Yet I begin to wonder whether he has been properly put to the test. See how the world protects him! Sometimes I am appalled. It is as if we wrapped the doers of evil in cotton wool, so that not even rudeness might disturb them. He has merely maintained a perfect silence, and the world has done the rest. It has seemed more anxious to forget his crime than he to have it forgotten. So he lives with impunity, as it were. But he is not invulnerable. Life will challenge him yet ... it must be ... life, which is truth, and not the world. Can a man escape the anger and justice of the gods? That is why I concern myself with him—to know his final destiny'

"'You admit, then, that he's not the incarnate criminal you once thought him' I chaffed, unable to take the matter so deeply to heart 'He may be only a stupid fool with a wooden face and naturally good manners....'

"'Not stupid' Lee Fu interrupted 'Yet, on the other hand, not exceptional, not superior to life. Such faultless power of will is in itself no mean part of ability. He is, as you might say, self-centred—most accurately self-centred. But the challenge of the gods displaces the centre of all. He will be like a top that is done spinning. A little breath may topple him at last. Wait and see.... But, for the present, it is evident that were is nothing more to be learned. The mask is inscrutable'

"Thinking the case over at sea, I often laughed to myself over Lee Fu's intensity. Voyage followed voyage; at one time when I had just come in from Bankok and was on my way from the Jetty to Lee Fu's office, I passed Captain Wilbur on the opposite side of Queen's Road. He waved a hand to me as he turned the corner: at once it flashed across my mind that I hadn't observed the *Speedwell* in the roadstead as I came in. When I had finished my business with Lee Fu, I asked him for an explanation of Wilbur's presence in Hong Kong without his vessel.

"'You are mistaken, Captain—it has little significance' he answered with a quizzical smile 'So, after all, you pay a little attention? The fact is, the successful Captain Wilbur has retired from active service on the sea. He is now a ship owner, nothing more, and has favoured Hong Kong above all other ports as the seat of his retirement. He resides in a fine house on Graham Terrace, and has three chairmen in white livery edged with crimson.... Captain Nichols, you should steal a ship'

"'Who has gone in the *Speedwell*?' I inquired

"'An old friend of ours, one Captain Turner' said Lee Fu slowly, glancing in my direction.

"'Not Will Turner?'

"'The same'

"I pursed up my mouth in a silent whistle. Will Turner in the *Speedwell*! Poor fellow, he must have lost another of his ill-starred vessels. Hard luck seemed to pursue him. One ship would be sold from under his command; several he had lost in deep water, by fire, storm or old age; another had sprung a leak in the Java Sea,

to be condemned a little later when he had worked her into Batavia. A capable sailor and an honest man; yet life had afforded him nothing but a succession of hard blows and heavy falls. Death and sorrow, too; he had buried a wife and child, swept off by cholera, in the Bay of Bengal. A dozen years before, Turner and I had landed together in the China Sea, and were thrown much in each other's company; I knew his heart, his history, some of his secrets, and liked him tremendously for the man he was.

"Watching Lee Fu in silence, I thought again of the relationship between Will Turner and this extraordinary Chinaman. I won't go into that story now, but there were overwhelming reasons why these two should think well of each other; why Lee Fu should respect and honour Captain Turner, and why Turner should consider Lee Fu his best friend. It had come about as the result of an incident of Turner's early days in the East; an incident of a ship, a rascal and a doctored charter-party, that might have turned into an ugly business save for the conduct and perspicacity of the two chief victims. It had thrown them violently together; ever since, they had kept the bond close and hidden, as became men of reserve. Probably I was the only man in the world who knew how strong it was.

"And now Turner had taken Wilbur's ship. Strange how this new development seemed to impinge on Lee Fu's fancy, how it brought the Wilbur case nearer home. The next moment, of course, the impression had passed; and I saw that, instead of marking another stroke of ill-luck for Turner, it might spell the beginning of good fortune.

"'What happened to the old *Altair*?' I asked. Turner had commanded a trading packet of that name three months before.

"'She was bought by certain parties for a store-ship, and now lies moored on Kowloon-side' answered Lee Fu 'I was about to make a proposal to Captain Turner, when this plan came forward' he went on, as if excusing himself 'I did not know of it until he had actually accepted. I said everything in my power to dissuade him…'

"'What's the trouble? Didn't Wilbur do the right thing by him?' I asked.

"'Captain, you are perverse. The business arrangement is immaterial. It is unthinkable that our friend should command a ship for such a man. The jealous gods have not yet shown their hand'

"'Nonsense, Lee Fu!' I exclaimed, finding myself irritated at the out-cropping of the old conceit 'Since the thing is done, hadn't we better try to be practical in our attitude?'

"'Exactly' said Lee Fu 'Let us be practical…. Captain Nichols, is it impossible for the Caucasian to reason from cause to effect? There seems to be no logic in your design—which explains many curious facts of history. I have merely insisted, in our consideration of this case, that a man who would do one thing would do

another, and that sooner or later life would inevitably present him with another thing to do'

"'But I've known too many men who escaped what you call destiny' I argued peevishly.

"'Have you?' inquired Lee Fu.

"He said no more, and we went out to tiffin"

IV

"That year I plunged into the Malay Archipelago for an extended cruise, was gone seven months among the islands, and wasted another month coming up the China Sea in order to dodge the tail-end of the typhoon season. But luck favoured me, of course, since I wasn't in a hurry; and so it happened that for the last three hundred miles across from Luzon I raced with a typhoon after all, beating it to an anchorage in Hong Kong by a margin of twelve hours. It was an exceptionally late storm; and the late ones, you know, are the least dependable in their actions. Typhoon signals were flying from the Peak as I came in; before the *Omega's* sails were furled the sky to the eastward had lowered and darkened like a shutter, and the wind had begun to whip in vicious gusts across the harbour.

"I went ashore at once, for I carried important papers from Lee Fu's chief agent in the islands. When I reached his outer office, I found it full of gathering gloom, although it was still early afternoon. Sing Toy immediately took in my name. In a moment I was ushered into the familiar room where my friend sat beside a shaded lamp, facing a teakwood desk inlaid with ivory and invariably bare, save for a priceless Ming vase and an ornament of old green bronze.

"'Back again, Lee Fu' said I, placing the island letters on the desk before him 'And just in time, it seems' A rising gust outside whined along the street.

"He paid no attention to my greeting or the letters. 'Sit down, Captain' said he 'I have bad news'

"'Yes?' I queried, somewhat alarmed at the vagueness of the announcement. So far as I was aware, no matter that we shared between us could result in 'bad news' said in such a tone.

"Folding his hands across his stomach and slightly bowing his head, he gazed at me with a level upturned glance that without betraying expression carried by its very immobility a hint of deep emotion.

"'It is as I told you' said he at last 'Now, perhaps, you will believe'

"'For Heaven's sake, what are you talking about?' I demanded 'Tell me instantly what is wrong'

"He nodded slowly. 'There is plenty of time—and I will tell. It is often said that the season that brings a late typhoon, as now, is also ushered in by an early typhoon. So it was this season. A very severe storm came down before its time, and almost without warning.... It was this storm into whose face our late friend Captain Turner took his ship, the *Speedwell*, sailing from Hong Kong for New York some four months ago'

"'You don't mean that Turner has lost her?'

"'I regret to inform you, yes. Also, he has lost himself. Three days after sailing, he met the typhoon outside, and was blown upon a lee shore two hundred miles along the China Coast. In this predicament, he cut away his masts and came to anchor. But his ship would not float, and accordingly sank at her anchors....'

"'Sank at her anchors!' I exclaimed 'How could that be? A tight ship never did such a thing'

"'Nevertheless, she sank there in the midst of the storm, and all on board perished. Afterwards, the news was reported from shore, and the hull of the *Speedwell* was discovered in ten fathoms of water. There has been talk of trying to save the ship; and Captain Wilbur himself, her owner, in a diver's suit, has inspected the wreck. Surely, he should be well-fitted to save her again, if it were possible! He says no, and it is reported that the insurance companies are in agreement with him. That is, they have decided that he cannot turn the trick a second time' Lee Fu's voice dropped to a rasping tone 'The lives, likewise, cannot be saved'

"I sat for some moments in silence, gazing at the green bronze dragon on the desk. Turner gone? A friend's death is shocking, even though it makes so little difference. And between us, too, there had been a bond.... I was thinking of the personal loss, and had missed the significance of Lee Fu's phraseology. I looked up at him blankly; found him still regarding me with up-turned eyes, his chin sunk lower on his breast.

"'That is not all' said he suddenly.

"I sat up as if under the impact of a blow. Across my mind raced thoughts of all that might happen to a man on that abandoned coast. 'What more?' I asked.

"'Listen, Captain, and pay close attention. I have investigated with great care, and am fully satisfied that no mistake has been made. You must believe me.... Some weeks after the departure and loss of the *Speedwell*, word came to my ears that a man had a tale worth hearing. You know how information reaches me, and that my sources run through unexpected channels among my people. This man was brought; he proved to be a common coolie, a lighter-man who had been employed in the loading of the *Speedwell*. Note how slight chance may lead to

serious occasions. This coolie had been gambling during the dinner hour, and had lost the small sum that he should have taken home as the product of several days' labour. Like many others, he feared his wife, and particularly her mother, who was a shrew. In a moment of desperation, as the lighter was preparing to leave the vessel for the night, he escaped from the others and secreted himself in the *Speedwell's* lower hold, among the bales of merchandise. What he planned is hard to tell; it does not matter.

"'This happened while yet the ship's lower hold was not quite filled' Lee Fu went on after a pause 'The coolie, as I said, secreted himself in the cargo, well forward, for he had entered by the fore hatch. There he remained many hours, sleeping, and when he awoke, quietness had descended on the deck above. He was about to climb into the between-decks, the air below being heavy with the odours of the cargo, when he heard a sound on the ladder that led down from the upper deck. It was a sound of quiet steps, mingled with a faint metallic rattling. In a moment a foot descended on the floor of the between-decks, and a lantern was cautiously lighted. The coolie retreated quickly to his former hiding place, from which post he was able to see all that went on'

"Again Lee Fu paused, as if lingering in imagination over the scene. 'It seems that this late and secret comer into the hold of the *Speedwell* was none other than her owner, Captain Wilbur' he slowly resumed 'The coolie knew his face; a distant cousin had once been in the employment of the Wilbur household, and the man was already aware whose ship it was. Most of the inner facts of life are disseminated through the gossip of servants, and are known to a wide circle. Furthermore, as the lighter had been preparing to depart that evening, this coolie had seen the owner come on board in his own sampan. Afterwards, through my inquiries among sampan-men and others, I learned that Captain Turner had spent that night on shore. It was Captain Wilbur's custom, it seems, frequently to sleep on board his ship when she lay here in port; the starboard stateroom was kept in readiness for him. So he had done this night—and he had been alone in the cabin'

"'What was he doing in the hold with a lantern?' I asked, unable to restrain my impatience.

"'Exactly … you shall hear. I was obliged to make certain deductions from the story of the coolie, for he was not technically acquainted with the internal construction of a vessel. Yet what he saw was perfectly obvious to the most ignorant eye.… Have you ever been in the lower hold of the *Speedwell*, Captain Nichols?'

"'No, I haven't'

"'But you recall the famous matter of her bow-ports, do you not?'

"'Yes, indeed. I was in Singapore when they were cut'

"The incident came back to me at once, in full detail. There had been a

cargo of ironwood on the beach, destined for the repair of a temple somewhere up the Yang-tse-kiang; among it were seven magnificent sticks of timber, each over a hundred feet in length and forty inches square at the butt—these were for columns, I suppose. It had been necessary to find a large ship to take this cargo from Singapore to Shanghai; the *Speedwell* had finally accepted the charter. In order to load the immense column-timbers, she had been obliged to cut bow-ports of extraordinary size; fifty inches in depth they were, and nearly seven feet in width, according to my recollection—the biggest bow-ports on record.

"'It has been my privilege' Lee Fu went on 'to examine the fore-peak of the *Speedwell* when these ports were in and her hold was empty. I had once chartered the ship, and felt alarmed for her safety until I had seen the interior fastenings of those great windows which, when she was loaded, looked out into the deep sea. But my alarm was groundless. There was a most ingenious device for strengthening the bows where they had been weakened by the cutting of the ports. Four or five timbers had been severed; but these had been reproduced on the port itself, and the whole was fashioned like a massive door. It lifted upward on immense wrought iron hinges, a hinge to every timber; when it was lowered into its place, gigantic bars of iron, fitted into brackets on the adjoining timbers, stretched across its inner face to hold it against the impact of the waves. At the bottom there were additional fastenings. Thus the port, when tightly caulked from without, became an integral part of the hull; I was told, and could believe it, that there had never been a trace of leakage from her bows. Most remarkable of all, I was told that when it became necessary to lift these ports for use, the task could easily be accomplished by two or three men and a stout watch-tackle.... This, also, I am prepared to believe'

"There seemed to be a general drift to Lee Fu's rambling narrative, but I hadn't yet caught sight of a logical dénouement. 'To resume the story of the coolie' he continued with exasperating deliberation 'This, in plain language, is what he saw. Our friend, Captain Wilbur, descended into the lower hold, and worked his way forward to the fore-peak, where there was little cargo. There he laboured with great effort for several hours; you will recall that he is a vigorous man. He had equipped himself with a short crowbar, and carried a light tackle wrapped about his body beneath the coat. The tackle he loosened and hung to a hook above the middle of the port; I take it that he had brought this gear merely for the purpose of lowering easily the iron cross bars, so that they would make no noise. Had one fallen...'

"'Good God, Lee Fu, what are you trying to tell me?'

"'Merely occurrences. Many quite impossible things, Captain, nevertheless get themselves done in the dark, in secret places, out of sight and mind.... So, with the short crowbar he pried loose little by little the iron braces to the port,

slinging them in his tackle and dropping them softly one by one into the ship's bottom. It was a heavy task; the coolie said that sweat poured from the big man like rain. Yet he was bent on accomplishment, and persevered until he had done the job. Later he removed all the additional port fastenings; last of all he covered the cross-bars with dunnage, and rolled against the bow several bulky bales of matting to conceal the crime.... Captain, when the *Speedwell* sailed from Hong Kong on her last voyage in command of our honoured friend one of her great bowports below the water hung on its hinges without internal fastenings, held in place only by the tightness of the caulking. The first heavy sea...'

"'Can it be possible?' said I through clenched teeth.

"'Oh, yes, so easily. It happened, and has become a part of life. As I told you, I have investigated with scrupulous care; my men dare not tell me lies'

"I was still trying to get my bearings, to grasp a clue. 'But why should he do it, Lee Fu? Had he anything against Turner?'

"'Not at all. You do not seem to understand. He was tired of the vessel, and freights were becoming very poor. He wanted the insurance. He now assures himself that he had no thought of disaster; one could hardly foresee an early typhoon. He had it in mind for the ship to sink discreetly, in pleasant weather, so that all hands might escape.... Yet he was willing to run the risk of wholesale murder. Remember how he sweated at the task, there in the fetid air of the lower hold. It was absentee murder, if you will; he did not contemplate, he was not forced to contemplate, the possible results of his act on the lives of others.... What do you think now, Captain, of a man who will betray his profession?'

"I got up abruptly and began to pace the floor. The damnable affair had made me sick at heart, and a little sick at the stomach. What to think?—what to believe? It seemed incredible, fantastic; there must be some mistake.... While I was pacing, Lee Fu changed his position. He faced the desk, stretched out an arm, and put his palm flat down on the polished surface.

"'Thus the gods have struck' said he, in that changeless voice that seemed an echo of the ages 'There is blood at last, Captain—twenty-seven lives, and among them one dear to us—enough to convince even one of your race that a crime has been committed. But my analysis was seriously in error. The criminal, it seems, is destined not to suffer. He continues to go about carried by three men in white and crimson livery, his belly full of food and wine. Others have paid the price. Instead of toppling, his life spins on with renewed momentum. My query has been answered; he has escaped the gods'

"'Can't you rip the case open, jostle his security? Isn't there some way...?'

"'No way' said Lee Fu with a shake of the head 'You forget the fine principle of extraterritoriality, which you have so kindly imposed on us by force of arms. Captain Wilbur is not subject to Chinese justice; your own courts have exclusive

jurisdiction over him, his kind, and all their works. No, Captain, he is amply protected. What could I accomplish in your courts with this fanciful accusation, and for witnesses a coolie and a sampan-man?'

"I continued to pace the floor, thinking dark thoughts. There was a way, of course ... between man and man; but such things aren't done any longer by civilized people. We're supposed not to go about with firearms, privately meting out justice. We are domesticated. Whatever the thoughts I might have harboured, in the first anger of the realization of wrong, I knew very well that I shouldn't act on them. Lee Fu was right, there was nothing to be done; the man had made good his escape from the hand of destiny.

"Pacing rapidly, as if pursued by a veritable phantom of crime, and oblivious of everything but the four walls of the room, I nearly floored the chief clerk, Sing Toy, as he pattered in with a message from the outer office. He ducked, slipped behind the lamp, and began whispering in Lee Fu's ear.

"'*Ah!*' exclaimed Lee Fu sharply.

"I started, whirled around in my tracks. His voice had lost the level, passive tone; it had taken on the timbre of action. Suddenly, with a quick rustle of silken garments, he stood up behind the desk; the abrupt motion threw his shadow across the floor and up the opposite wall. With a subtle thrill of anticipation, I felt the profound psychic change that had come over my friend. The very air of the room had quickened before that single exclamation, as if a cold breeze had blown through.... A breeze, indeed, was at that moment trying hard to find an entrance; the absolute silence of the room brought out in sharp relief the tumult outside, the hoarse voice of the rising gale. We stood as if listening. I looked at Lee Fu, caught his eye. It was charged with energy and purpose, with something like relief—like the eye of a man who has made up his mind after a long period of bewilderment, who begins to understand....

"'Send him in, alone' said he in Chinese to Sing Toy, now at the outer door.

"'Who is it?' I asked hoarsely.

"'The man we have been speaking of'

"'Wilbur? What the devil...?'

"'He merely dropped in as he was passing, to make a call' said Lee Fu, speaking rapidly 'So he thinks—but I think otherwise' Leaning forward across the desk, he fixed me with an extended arm that trembled slightly before it found its aim. 'Keep silence' he commanded 'Beware of word or glance. This chanced by predestination. We are on the threshold of the gods'

V

Lee Fu remained standing as Captain Wilbur entered the room. His hurried admonition still rang in my ears 'Keep silence—beware of word or glance!' But I couldn't have spoken; had I opened my mouth just then, it would have been only to emit a snarl of anger. To beware of glances was a different matter. The task might be easy enough for Lee Fu, with that perfect self-control of his that extended to the last nerve of his eyelids and the last muscle of his fingertips; but for my part I was spiritually incapable, as it were, of keeping rage and abomination out of my eyes. I stood as if rooted to the floor, gazing point-blank at Wilbur with a stare that must have made him wonder about my sanity. For, of course, he hadn't the slightest suspicion that we knew what we knew.

"'Good afternoon, Captain Wilbur' said Lee Fu blandly 'Do you seek refuge from the storm? ... I think you are acquainted with Captain Nichols, of the barque *Omega.* He arrived this morning from the Celebes'

"'Oh, how do you do, Nichols' said Wilbur, advancing down the room 'I've missed you around town for a good while, it seems to me. So you've been off on one of your famous exploring trips? Then you'll have a lot to tell us. I suppose you had the usual assortment of romantic and tragic adventures?'

"I drew back behind the desk, to escape shaking his hand. 'No' I answered 'nothing like the adventure that awaited me here'

"He settled himself in a chair, directly in range of the light; smiled, and lifted his eyebrows. 'So...? Well, I can believe you. This office, you know, is the heart of all adventure. The most romantic room in the East—presided over by the very genius of romance' He bowed toward Lee Fu, and touched a match to a long Manila. 'Genius, or demon, which is it, now?' he chuckled, his eyes twinkling from Lee Fu to me.

"'You honour me, Captain' interposed Lee Fu quickly, cutting me off from the necessity of speaking. 'If, indeed, you do not flatter. I merely observe and live. It is life that may be called the heart of all adventure—life, with its amazing secrets that one by one transpire into the day, and with its enormous burden of evil that weighs us down like slaves'

"Wilbur laughed. 'Yes, that's it, no doubt. But there's some good, too, Lee Fu—plenty of good. Don't be a pessimist. Yet you're right enough in a way; the evil always does manage to be more romantic'

"'Much more romantic' observed Lee Fu 'And the secrets are more romantic still. Consider, for instance, the case of a man with a dark secret that by chance has become known, though he is not aware of the fact. How infinitely romantic!

He feels secure; yet inevitably it will be disclosed. When, and how? Such a case would be well worth watching ... as the great poet had in mind when he wrote "Murder will out"'

"The winged words made no impression on their mark. Wilbur met Lee Fu's glance frankly, innocently, with interest and even with a trace of amusement at the other's flight of fancy. The full light of the lamp illuminated his features, the least fleeting expression couldn't have escaped us. By Jove, he was superb; the damned rascal hadn't a nerve in his body. To be sure, he still had no suspicion, and attributed Lee Fu's shaft to a mere chance; yet this very factor of safety lent additional point to the finish of his dissimulation. He might at least have indulged himself in a start, a glance, a knitting of the eyebrows; his conscience, or his memory if he hadn't a conscience, might have received a faint surprise. But his watchfulness must have been unfailing, automatic. Or was it that a reminder of his appalling crime woke no echo at all in his breast?

"I examined him closely. Above a trimmed brown beard his cheeks showed the ruddy colour of health and energy; his eyes were steady, his mouth was strong and clean, a head of fine grey hair surmounted a high forehead; the whole aspect of his countenance was pleasing and dignified. He had good hands, broad yet closely knit, and ruddy with the same glow of health that rose in his face. He was dressed neatly in a plain blue serge suit, with square-toed russet shoes encasing small feet, a dark bow-tie at his throat, and a narrow gold watch chain strung across his vest. Sitting at ease, with an arm thrown over the chair-back and one ankle resting on the other knee, he presented a fine figure of a man, a figure that might have been that of a prosperous and benevolent merchant, a man who had passed through the world with merit and integrity, and now was enjoying his just reward.

"He gave a hearty laugh. 'For the Lord's sake, you fellows, come on out of the gloom!' he cried 'A pretty state of mind you seem to have worked yourselves into, hobnobbing here behind closed doors. I drop in for a chat, and find a couple of blue devils up to their ears in the sins of humanity. Nichols, over there, is just as bad as the other; he's scarcely opened his mouth since I came in. What's the matter? ... You have to fight these moods, you know' he quizzed 'It doesn't do to let them get the upper hand'

"'It is the mood of the approaching storm' said Lee Fu quietly 'We have been speaking of typhoons, and of the fate that they sometimes bring to men'

"A fiercer squall than the last shook the building; it passed in a moment, ceasing suddenly, as if dropping us somewhere in mid-air. Wilbur was the first to speak after the uproar.

"'Yes, it's going to be another terror, I'm afraid. A bad night to be on the water, gentlemen. I shouldn't care to be threshing around outside, now, as poor

Turner was such a short time ago'

"I could have struck him across the mouth for the shocking callousness of the words. A bad night outside! He dared to speak of it; he, sitting there so comfortably, so correctly, alive and well, glad to be safe in port and sorry for those afloat—the same remorseless devil who had sent Turner to his doom.

"Lee Fu's voice fell like oil on a breaking sea. 'All signs point to another severe typhoon. But, as I was telling Captain Nichols, these late storms are often irregular—like the early ones.... It happened, Captain Wilbur, that the loss of the *Speedwell* was the subject we were discussing when you came in'

"'Too bad—too bad' said Wilbur soberly, as if overcome by thoughts of the disaster 'You were away, Nichols, weren't you? Of course!—then you've just heard of it. It was a bad week here, I can tell you, after the news came in. I shall never forget it.... Well, we take our chances....'

"'Some of us do, and some of us don't' I snapped.

"'That's just the way I felt about it, at the time' said he simply 'I didn't feel right, to have both feet on the ground. Seemed as if there must have been something we could have done, something we had neglected. It came home hard to me'

"My jaw fairly dropped as I listened to the man. Something he had neglected? ... Was it possible that he liked to talk about the affair? He didn't seem anxious to turn the conversation.

"'Captain Nichols and I were wondering' observed Lee Fu 'why it was that the *Speedwell* did not remain afloat, after she had cast her anchors. Neither of us can recall another incident of the kind. What is your opinion, Captain Wilbur; you have examined the hull, as it lies on the bottom'

"'It isn't a matter of opinion' Wilbur answered 'Haven't I told you?—I thought I'd seen you since the inspection. I put on a diver's suit, you know, Nichols, and went down.... Why, the simple explanation is, her starboard bow-port in the lower hold is stove in. It must have happened after she came to anchor. She lay there just scooping up water at every plunge—filled and sank as she lay. I've always been afraid of those big bow-ports; the moment I heard of the peculiar circumstances of the disaster, I knew in my heart what had happened'

"'Did you?' inquired Lee Fu, with a slight hardening of the voice 'Strange—but so did I'

"Wilbur gazed at him questioningly, knitting his brows. 'Oh, yes, I remember. I was wondering how you happened to think of her bow-ports. But you told me that you had examined them....'

"'Yes, I examined them.... Captain Wilbur, have you collected your insurance money?' The question came with an abruptness that marked a change of tactics; to me, who knew Lee Fu so well, it obviously marked the first turning

point in some as yet impenetrable plan.

"Wilbur frowned and glanced up sharply, very properly offended. The next moment he had decided to pass it off as an instance of alien manners. 'As a matter of fact, I've just cleaned up to-day' he replied brusquely 'Had my final settlement with Lloyds this morning—and did a silly thing, as a fellow will sometimes. You know, they had a package of large denomination bank notes in the office, crisp, wonderful looking fellows; I took a sudden fancy for them, and in a moment of childishness asked to have my money in that form. They chaffed me a good deal, but I stuck to it. You'd hardly believe, would you, that a fellow would be such a fool? I can prove it to you, though; I've got those bills in my pocket now. By Jove, that reminds me—what time is it getting to be? I must leave them at the bank before it closes'

"'What is the total amount of the bank notes that you have in your possession?' asked Lee Fu in a level tone that carried its own insult.

Wilbur plainly showed his astonishment now. 'The total amount? ... Well, if you want all the details, I have about forty thousand dollars in my pocket. I'm not aware, however, that it's any concern of yours....'

"Lee Fu shot at me a stare full of meaning; it might have been a look of caution, or a glance of triumph. I was expected to understand something; but for the life of me I couldn't catch the drift of the situation. Confused by the terrific struggle to keep my mouth shut, I only perceived that a crisis was impending.

"'As I was saying, I once examined the bow-ports of the *Speedwell*' Lee Fu calmly resumed. 'At that time, I satisfied myself as to their construction; unlike you, Captain Wilbur, I could not be afraid of them. When properly fastened, they were impregnable to any danger of the sea.... And I remember, Captain, that it occurred to me, as I examined their fastenings, how easily these ports could be loosened from within, by anyone who desired to sink the vessel. The iron cross-bars could be lifted from their brackets by a single strong man; with a small tackle they could be dropped without noise into the bottom. No one need know of it; and, lo, the ship would sail to meet her destiny riding on the waves. Has the thought ever occurred to you, Captain Wilbur?'

"Wilbur's air of mingled repugnance and perplexity was innocence itself. 'I can't say that it has' he answered shortly 'Your imagination is a little morbid, Lee Fu—I won't say worse. Who would want to sink the *Speedwell*, I'd like to know?'

"'Who, indeed?' observed Lee Fu, staring at Wilbur with a steady, biting gaze. As he stared, he reached out slowly with his right hand and opened the top drawer of the desk. Suddenly he stood up. The hand held a revolver, which pointed with an unwavering aim at Wilbur's breast.

"'If you move from your chair, Captain, I will shoot you dead, and your end will never be known' said he rapidly, throwing a cold determination into his voice

'It is time we came to an understanding, for the day wanes'

"Wilbur uncrossed his legs, leaned forward, and looked at Lee Fu narrowly. 'What's the joke?' he demanded.

"'A joke that will be clear as time goes on—like one you played with bow-ports on my friend.... Captain, we are about to go on a journey. Will you join us, Captain Nichols, or will you remain on shore?'

"The question was perfunctory; whatever was in the wind, Lee Fu knew that my decision rested in his hands. I stood up—for until now I'd been chained to my chair by the amazing turn of the moment.

"'Bow-ports?...' Wilbur was saying 'Put that gun down. What in hell do you mean?' He started to rise.

'Sit down!' commanded Lee Fu 'I mean that I will shoot. This is not play' Their eyes met in a sharp struggle, which Lee Fu won. Wilbur sank back, angry and confused.

"'Are you crazy, Lee Fu?' he growled 'What is it—do you want to rob me? What's the meaning of this nonsense, Nichols? Have both of you gone mad?'

"'No, Captain' interposed Lee Fu 'But we have found a man who wanted to sink the *Speedwell*,, and we wish to observe him under certain conditions.... Is it possible that you do not as yet comprehend that I share your secret? You were seen, Captain, that black and cruel night in the forepeak; and those details, also, are known to me. It is needless to dissemble longer'

"'That night in the forepeak? ... For God's sake, Lee Fu, what are you talking about? Nichols, this is too ridiculous! Tell me the answer, and get over with it'

"'Ah!' exclaimed Lee Fu with something like satisfaction 'You are worthy of the occasion, Captain. It will be most interesting'

"He slapped his palm sharply on the desk; Sing Toy appeared at the door as if by a mechanical arrangement. 'Bring oilskin coats and hats for three' Lee Fu commanded 'Also send in haste to my cruising sampan, with orders to prepare for an immediate journey. Have water and food prepared for a week. We come within the half-hour, and will sail without delay'

"'Master!' protested Sing Toy breathlessly—their words, in rapid Chinese, were wholly unintelligible to Wilbur. 'Master, the typhoon!' He glanced at the revolver in Lee Fu's hand, then raised his eyes to the wall that smothered the tumult of the gale.

"'I know, fool' answered Lee Fu 'I am neither deaf nor blind. But it is necessary to sail. Go, quickly, do as I say'

"He sat down, resting the revolver on the corner of the desk, and resumed his former tone of bland conversation 'I am sorry, gentlemen, that the rain has already come; but there is water also below, as Captain Wilbur should be well aware. Yes, it was destined from the first that this should be a wet journey. Yet it

will be possible still to breathe; not quite so bad as solid water all around, where after a grim struggle one lies at rest, neither caring nor remembering.... Captain Wilbur, attend to what I say. We go from this office to my sampan, which lies moored at the bulkhead, not far away. During the walk, you will precede us. I shall hold my revolver in my hand—and I am an excellent shot. If you attempt to escape, or to communicate with any passerby—if you call for help, or even disclose by your manner the strangeness of the occasion—you will immediately be dead. Bear this in mind. And do not think that I should fear the consequences; we shall pass through Chinese streets, where action of mine would not be questioned'

"'Damn you!' Wilbur burst out 'What crazy nonsense are you up to? Nichols, will you permit this? Where are you taking me?'

"'Never mind' replied Lee Fu 'As for Captain Nichols, he knows, if anything, less than you do about it. He, also, is at my mercy.... Ah, here are the raincoats. Put one on, Captain Wilbur; you will need it sorely before your return. Now we must hurry. I would be clear of the harbour before darkness falls entirely'

VI

"As we issued from the doorway, the gale caught us with a swirl that carried us round the corner and down a side street before we could get our breath. 'To the right' Lee Fu shouted. Wilbur, lurching ahead, obeyed sullenly. We came about and made for the water front through the fringe of the Chinese quarter—the most remarkable trio, perhaps, that had ever threaded those familiar thoroughfares. Few people were abroad; a Chinaman now and then scurried to cover in our path, and more infrequently we caught sight of a stray European in the distance, called out somewhere by the exigencies of business.

"Overhead, the sky had settled low on the slope of the Peak, cutting off the heights from view; it presented the aspect of a heavy leaden roof, spreading above the mainland to northward, fitting tight along the horizon, and seeming to compress the whole atmosphere. Torrents of rain fell from the frequent squalls; the running water in the streets spurted about our ankles. We floundered on, enveloped in a sort of grey gloom like that of an eclipse. When we reached the harbour, the face of the bay had undergone a sinister change; its yellow-green waters were lashed into sickly foam, and shrouded by an unnatural gleaming darkness. A distant moaning sound ran through the upper air, vague yet distinctly audi-

ble. It was evident to the practised eye that the southern margin of the typhoon wasn't far away; with the wind in this quarter, its centre was headed straight in our direction.

"As we staggered along the quay, my thoughts worked rapidly. The wind and the open had cleared my mind as to the swift events of the last half-hour; I began to perceive the plan, now, and immediately recognized the dangerous nature of the undertaking on which we'd embarked. It was to be a game of bluff, in which we should have to risk our lives if the other held his ground. I'd seen Lee Fu in action; I knew that he would hesitate at nothing, since his face was committed to the enterprise.

"I edged toward him. 'Will you go on the water?' I asked close to his ear.

"He nodded, keeping his eyes fixed on Wilbur.

"'But it can't be done' I told him 'A boat won't live....'

"'There is always a definite alternative' he replied.

"'Yes, that she sinks'

"'Exactly'

"I drew away, reviewing the details once more.... All at once, in a flash of enlightenment, the greatness of the occasion came to me. By Jove! Lee Fu had taken the matter into his own hands, he had stepped in where the gods were impotent. But not rudely, as men are apt to do in sudden passion; not with blood and vengeance, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. No, he had observed the divine proprieties; had recognized that if he presumed to act for the gods, he must throw his own life as well into the balance. He himself must run every risk. It was for them, after all, to make the final choice. His part was to force action on the gods.

"I gazed at him in wonder—and with more than a flurry of alarm. He advanced stiffly against the storm, walking like an automaton; his expression was absolutely inscrutable. Beneath the close-pulled rim of a black sou'wester his smooth, oval countenance looked ridiculously vacant, like the face of a placid moon. He was the only calm object in earth, sea, or sky; against the lashing rain, the dancing boats, the scudding clouds, the hurried shadows of appearing and vanishing men, he stood out solidly, a different essence, the embodiment of mind and will. Only these could have been superior to the grosser temptation; only these could have met the test, and risen to the awful stratagem.

"And how was it with Wilbur, off there in the lead? He, too, walked stiffly, wrapped in thought. Once he turned round, as if to come back and speak to us; then whirled with a violent movement of decision and plunged on into the rain. He must have known, by now, what it was all about, if not what to expect. He must have known that his crime had been discovered. Yet he had made no break; in no particular had he given himself away. What had he been about to say?—what had

he decided? To hold on, of course, maintain the bluff—for he could not believe that we knew all. Would he confess, when he faced death on the water? How long would he hold on?

"Observing his broad back, his commanding figure, that looked thoroughly at home in its oilskin coat and leaning against the storm, it came to me that he would put up a desperate defence before he succumbed. He, too, was a strong man, and no part of a coward; he, too, in a different way, was a superior being, the embodiment of mind and will. I didn't under-estimate him. Indeed, he was worthy of the occasion and of his adversary. It was to be a battle of the giants, with typhoon for background and accompaniment.

"Then, for an instant, my own spirit went slump with the realization of what might lie ahead, and a great weakness overcame me. I edged again toward Lee Fu.

"'My God, suppose the man is really innocent?' I cried 'He hasn't turned a hair....'

"Lee Fu gave me a flash of the moon-face beneath the sou'wester.

"'Have no fear, my friend' said he 'I am completely satisfied, in regions where the soul dwells. It has begun very well'

VII

"When we reached the sampan, lying under a weather shore beneath the bulkhead, we found a scene of consternation. Lee Fu's orders had arrived and been executed; yet the men couldn't believe that he actually meant to sail. Gathered in a panic-stricken group on the fore deck of the sampan, they chattered like a flock of magpies; their gleaming wet bodies writhed in wild gestures under the half-light. As they caught sight of us, they swarmed across the bulkhead and fell at Lee Fu's feet, begging for mercy.

"'Up dogs!' he cried 'There is no danger. I shall steer; and it is necessary that we go. If any would remain, let them depart now, with no tale to tell. Let those who stay prepare at once for sea'

"Not a man made a move to go; the presence and voice of the master had reassured them. Without another word, they rose and filed on board.

"I found Wilbur beside me. 'What is this madness, Nichols?' he demanded for the last time 'Are you fool enough to go on the water in that craft? What has that lunatic been saying to the men?—I don't understand their damned lingo'

"'He told his crew to prepare for sea' I answered shortly 'If he goes, we all go. He says there is no danger'

"'Huh! You're a bigger fool than I took you for'

"A moment later we stood together on the quarter-deck of the cruising sampan. Lee Fu took his station at the great tiller, that archaic steering arrangement worked by blocks and tackles which the Chinese cherish like the precepts of Confucius in the face of mechanical invention. The wind lulled for a moment, as the trough of a squall passed over. Lee Fu gave a few sharp orders. Moorings were cast off, a pinch of sail was lifted forward. The big craft found her freedom with a lurch and a stagger; then pulled herself together and left the land with a steady rush, skimming dead before the wind across the smooth weather reach of the harbour, and quickly losing herself in the murk and spray that hung off Gowloon Point. If we were sighted from the fleet, which is extremely doubtful, we were put down as a junk that had broken adrift. Somehow Lee Fu managed to avoid the ships at anchor off Wanchi. Straight down the length of the bay he struck; in an incredibly short time we had left the harbour behind, and were whirling through the narrow gut of Lymoon Pass before a terrific squall, bound for the open sea.

"I watched Captain Wilbur. He stood in a careless attitude at the rail in our race down the harbour, scanning the boat and the water with an air of confidence and unconcern. A slight sneer curled his lip; he had made up his mind to see the nonsense through. The sailor in him had quickly recognized that the craft would stand the weather, so long as she remained in quiet water. Probably he expected every minute that Lee Fu would change his tactics and put into some sheltered cove.... But when we shot through Lymoon Pass, I saw him turn and scrutinize the Chinaman closely. Darkness was falling behind the murk, the real night now; ahead of us lay a widening reach among the islands, that opened abruptly on the main body of the China Sea. We were rapidly leaving the protection of Victoria Island. Soon we should be unable to see our way. Ten miles outside a high sea was running. And with every blast of wind that held in the same quarter, the centre of the typhoon was bearing down on us with unerring aim.

"These facts were as patent to Wilbur as to any of us. It was his knowledge, of course, that finally was his undoing; had he been less of a sailor, or had he been entirely ignorant of the sea, he could have resigned himself to the situation, on the assumption that those who were sailing the craft wouldn't put themselves in actual danger. Perhaps Lee Fu had realized this when he'd chosen the sea as the medium of justice; perhaps he had glimpsed the profound and subtle truth that Wilbur couldn't properly be broken save in his native environment. He knew the sea, he had trifled with it; then let him face the sea.

"The time came, just before we lost the loom of the land, when Wilbur could stand it no longer; as a sailor, used to responsibility and authority, he had to speak

his mind. He knew that the situation was growing very dangerous.... For my part, I had become convinced by now that it was irretrievable; it began to look as if we'd burned our last bridge behind us. I didn't pretend to understand; Lee Fu seemed reckless beyond measure, he had apparently given away his cards without trying to play them. One thing was certain—if some way couldn't be found to hold up this mad race immediately, we should be forced in the next five minutes to run the gauntlet of the typhoon in open water.

"Wilbur dropped aft beside Lee Fu, and made a funnel of his hands.

"'You're running to your death!' he shouted. 'Do you realize what you're doing? You've already lost Pootoy. If you can't haul up and make the lee of the Lema Islands...'

"'I intend to pass nowhere near them—and I know exactly what I am doing' answered Lee Fu, keeping his eyes on the yawing bow of the sampan.

"'There's nothing to the eastward ... no more shelter..."

"'Of that I am aware'

"'Do you know the meaning of *that*?' Wilbur pointed wildly above the stern rail, into the face of the onrushing storm.

"'I think we shall get the centre of the typhoon, Captain, by noon of tomorrow'

"Wilbur made a move as if to grasp the tiller. 'Haul up, you fool!...'

"A stray gleam in the gathering darkness caught the barrel of the revolver, as Lee Fu steered for a moment with one hand.

"'Beware, Captain! You are the fool; would you broach us to, and end it now? One thing alone will send me to seek the last shelter; and for that thing I think you are not ready'

"'What?'

"'To say that you sank the *Speedwell*, as I have indicated'

"Wilbur gathered his strength as if to strike; his face was distorted with passion.

"'You lie, you yellow hound!'

"'Exactly.... Captain, be careful—come no nearer! Also, leave me now, and go away, for I have work to do. If you value your life, you will keep silence, and stay a little forward. Go, quickly! Here I could shoot you with even greater impunity'"

VIII

Nichols paused. "It may be that some of you fellows have never seen Lee Fu's cruising sampan" he remarked "In reality she is more of a junk than a sampan; a sizeable craft of over a hundred tons, the best product of the Chinese shipyard. Lee Fu built her for trips along the coast, where conditions of wind and weather are likely to be severe; many of his own ideas, born of an expert knowledge of ships of every rig and nationality, entered into her construction. The result is a distinctly Chinese creation, a craft that in some unaccountable way seems to reflect his own personality, that responds to his touch and works mysteriously for him. She's higher in the bows than an ordinary junk, and a trifle lower in the stern; a broad, shallow hull, requiring a centreboard on the wind. She is completely decked over for heavy weather. In charge of any one of us, perhaps, she would be fairly unmanageable; but in Lee Fu's hands, I can assure you, she's a sea-boat of remarkable attainments and a yacht of no insignificant speed.

"I had seen him handle her under difficult conditions, but never in such a pass as this. How he accomplished it was inconceivable to me. The last I saw of him that evening, he had called two men to help him at the tiller; so far, he had managed to keep the craft before the wind.... He continued to keep her before it throughout the night, running eastward in open water along the China coast. That is to say, he must have kept her before it—because we came through the night, alive and still afloat. But how, I cannot tell.

"For hours I was alone with the elements, surrounded by pitchy blackness and the storm. I clung to a stanchion, hardly changing my position during the night, drenched by rain and spray, seeing nothing, hearing no word of my companions. The gale roared above us with the peculiar tearing sound that accompanies the body of a typhoon—a sound suggestive of unearthly anger and violence, as if elemental forces were ripping up the envelope of the universe—a sound that carries its own message of latent power, of savage impulse, of unloosed destruction. The wind gained steadily in volume; it picked up the sea in steep ridges of solid water that flung us like a chip from crest to crest, or caught us, burst above us, and swallowed us whole, as if we had suddenly sunk down a deep well. From these plunges the sampan would emerge after a long interval, like a fish coming up to blow. It seemed impossible that she could be kept running; to come into the wind, however, would have been certain disaster. Every moment I expected would be our last. Yet, as time wore on, I felt, through the boat's frantic floundering, a touch of mastery. Lee Fu steered—she still was under his control.

"So we came through, and saw the dawn. A pale, watery light crept little by little across the east, disclosing a scene of terror beyond description. The face of the sea was livid with flying yellow foam; the torn sky hung closely over it like the fringe of a mighty waterfall. In the midst of this churning cauldron our little craft seemed momentarily on the point of disappearing, about to be engulfed by

the sheer wrath of the elements. It was a scene to compel the eye, while the heart whined in fear for the return of darkness or the swift downfall of oblivion.

"In a lull of the storm my glance encountered Wilbur; for a long while I'd forgotten him entirely. He hung to the rail a little farther forward, gazing across the maelstrom with a fixed exhausted expression. His face was haggard; the strain of the night had marked him with a ruthless hand. As I watched him, his eyes turned slowly in my direction; he gave me an anxious look, then crawled along the rail to a place by my side.

"'Nichols, we're lost!' I heard him cry in my ear. The voice was uneven, plaintive; it made me angry, and revived a few sparks of my own courage.

"'What of it?' I cried harshly 'Turner was lost, too'

"'You believe that?...'

"I looked at him point-blank; his eyes suddenly shifted, he couldn't face me now.

"'Why don't you own up, before it's too late?' I shouted at him.

"Without answering he moved away hastily, like innocence offended. But the strong man was gone, the air of perfect confidence had disappeared; he was shattered and spent, but not yet broken. Pride is a more tenacious quality than courage; men with hearts of water, with their knees knocking together, will continue to function through self-esteem. Besides, what would have been the use now, as he saw it, to make confession? Nothing, apparently, could save us; there was no shelter, no hope in sight....

"Looking above his head, where the sky and the sea met in a blanket of flying spume, I caught sight for an instant of something that resembled the vague form of a headland. Watching closely, I saw it again—unmistakeably the shadow of land, broad on the port bow.... Land! That meant that the wind had shifted to southward, that we were being blown against the shore. And that, in turn, meant that the centre of the typhoon had passed inland, behind Hong Kong, and would issue into the China Sea somewhere down the coast.

"I worked my way cautiously aft, where Lee Fu stood like a man of iron at the tiller, lashed to a heavy cross-rail that must have been constructed for such occasions. He saw me coming, leaned slightly toward me.

"'Land!' I shouted, pointing on the port bow.

"He nodded vigorously, disclosing that he'd already seen it. '... Recognize...' The rest of his answer was blown away by the storm.

"By pantomime, I called his attention to the shift of wind. Again he nodded—then ducked his head in Wilbur's direction, shouting something that I couldn't quite follow. '... Change our tactics ...' was what I understood him to say.

"What did he mean by that? My mind refused to function, save in channels of fantastic conjecture. I'd gained the impression that he was disappointed at

the present turn of affairs. Had he depended on the centre of the typhoon for his climax? Good God, had he wanted it to catch us? As matters stood, it was only by the extreme grace of providence that we remained alive. Now, it seems, something had miscarried, we must change our tactics … find some new horror to take the place of the one that had passed us by.

"He beckoned me to come closer; grasping the cross-rail, I swung down beside him.

"'I know our position' he cried in my ear 'Have no alarm, my friend. There are two large islands, and a third behind them, small like a button. Watch closely the button, while I steer. When it touches the high headland of the second larger island, give me the news instantly'

"He had hauled the junk a trifle to port as he spoke, and now with every opportunity began edging toward the land. Perilous business, in that tremendous seaway; but he executed the manoeuvre with infinite patience and caution, with consummate skill. Wilbur had now seen the land, had straightened his figure and leaned forward, watching it intently. Distances were veiled and distorted in that murky atmosphere; we were nearer to the headland than I had at first supposed. For perhaps twenty minutes we ran on, a tense new excitement tugging at our hearts. Then, as we raced before the gale, I felt the sea begin to grow calmer; glancing to windward, I saw on the horizon a fringe of spouting reefs, and realized that we'd entered the zone of their protection. The tall headland, which now revealed itself as the point of the second island, grew plainer with every moment; soon I made out the island like a button, and saw it closing rapidly on the land behind.

"'*Now!*' I shouted to Lee Fu, holding up both my arms, when the two points of land had touched.

"He swung the sampan a couple of points to starboard, discovering close beneath our bows the tip of another reef that stretched toward the land diagonally across the path of the wind. In a moment we were abreast this point of reef; a hundred yards away its spray lashed our decks, as the low-lying black rocks caught the broken wash of the storm. Another swing of the great tiller, and we had hauled up in the lee of the reef—in quiet water at last, but with the gale still screaming overhead like a defeated demon. We reached along this weather shore in a smother of spray, until we came abruptly to the little island. This we passed with a rush, and shot forward into a relatively smooth basin that lay under the protection of the high headland on the larger island.

"It was like nothing but a return from hell. The wind held us in a solid blast; but to feel the deck grow quiet, to be able to think, to speak, to hear … to see the land close aboard.… By Jove, we were saved!—it seemed more incredible than the adventure itself. Heads began to bob up forward, faces drawn with terror, frantic

with relief—the faces of men who had lost and found a world.

"A voice spoke gruffly beside us. 'By God, I hope you're satisfied!' We turned to see Wilbur standing at the head of the cross-rail. A twitching face belied the nonchalance that he'd attempted to throw into the words. It was a new phase of the man; his former perfect poise was stripped off like a mask, revealing an inner nature without force or quality, a common empty soul. The very assumption of coolness, a reflex of his over-powering relief, disclosed weakness instead of strength, impotence instead of authority.

"'I don't know how we managed to come through!' he snarled 'In the name of God, what made you try it? Nothing but luck—and now the typhoon's leaving us. We can haul up here until the wind goes down'

"'Is that all, Captain, that you have to say?' inquired Lee Fu, his attention still riveted on the course of the sampan.

"Wilbur clutched the rail as if he would tear it from its fastenings. 'A damned sight more, you blackguards, but I'll save that for the authorities!'

"'You feel no thanks for your escape—and there is nothing on your mind?'

"'We shouldn't have needed to escape, if you hadn't gone crazy. Come, let's wind up this farce and get to anchor somewhere. I'm fagged out'

"'No, we are going on' said Lee Fu calmly, making no move to bring the sampan into the wind 'No time for rest, Captain; the voyage is not over'

"'Going on?...' Wilbur's glance swept the sea ahead. Until that moment, I suppose, he thought he had won the battle; he hadn't dreamed that Lee Fu, after such a miraculous escape, would again put us all in jeopardy. He saw that, on the course we were holding, in a very brief interval we should leave the protection of the headland. What lay beyond, it was impossible to discover through the murk. He turned back fiercely; for a moment he and Lee Fu gazed deep into each other's eyes, in a grapple that gave no quarter.

"'Yes, Captain!' said Lee Fu sharply 'We have not yet reached the spot where the *Speedwell* met her doom. I cannot waste further time in talk. Return to your station, before I am forced to threaten you again.... This is merely an interlude'

IX

"Since that experience, I've many times examined the charts of the region where we were" Nichols went on "But they don't begin to show the whole story. Beyond

the middle island, under whose headland we'd found transitory shelter, stretched a larger island, distant some five miles from the other; between them lay the most intricate, extraordinary and terrible nest of reefs ever devised by the mind of the Maker and the hand of geologic change. No wonder the surveys haven't been completed in that region; I defy any man, in the calmest and clearest of weather, to take a craft among those reefs and come out with a whole bottom. Any man, that is, but Lee Fu Chang, who isn't in the service of the Admiralty.

"The outlying fringe of reefs that had broken our first approach ended at the middle island; beyond that, to windward, lay clear water, and the nest of reefs that I've mentioned received the full force of the wind and sea. Five miles of water stretched in mad confusion, a solid whiteness of spouting foam that seemed to generate a hideous illumination, that reflected a dingy glow into the abandoned sky. All the cataracts of the world rolled into one couldn't have matched the awful spectacle. We were still flying through quiet water; but just beyond the point of the middle island the long wind-swept rollers burst in tall columns of spray that shut off the farther view like a curtain, where the reef of rocks stood in an apparently unbroken wall.

"It was directly against the face of this wall that Lee Fu was driving the sampan. The first lift of the outside swell had begun to catch us. I held my breath, as moment by moment we cut down the margin of safety. No use to interfere; perhaps he knew what he was doing, perhaps he had really gone mad under the terrific strain of the night. As he steered, he seemed to be watching intently for landmarks; his eyes were everywhere, but more often, I noticed, on the shore to windward that rapidly changed its contour as we left it on the port quarter. Was it possible that, in this abandoned spot, he knew his bearings … that there was a way through?…

"Wilbur, at Lee Fu's command, had left us without a word. He now stood at the rail, supporting himself by main strength, facing the frightful line of the approaching reef; on his back was written the desperate struggle that went on in his soul. It bent and twisted, sagging in sudden irresolution, writhing with stubborn obduracy, straightening and shaking itself at times as a wave of firmness and confidence passed over him, only to quail once more before the sight that met his eyes … He couldn't believe that Lee Fu would hold that suicidal course. Only another moment!—he kept crying to himself. Hold on a little longer! Yet the power of his will had been sapped by the long hours of night and the terrors of the dawn; and courage, which with him rested only on the sands of ostentation, had crumbled long ago.

"For my part, I was cruelly afraid. Without clear comprehension, I felt the tremendous significance of the moment, perceived that the crisis had come in the battle of the wills. One or the other of them must break now; but if it didn't happen

shortly, there would be no time left in which to record the triumph. My eyes met Lee Fu's for an instant, as he swept the retreating shore. He threw some message into the glance—but I had passed beyond the range of understanding. It seemed to me that he was excited, even elated, and as calm as ever—as if he'd found those marks he had been looking for, as if he knew his ground.

"The deafening roar of the breakers filled our ears smothering the voice of the storm like an outburst of heavy artillery. I turned away, overcome by a sickening sensation. I couldn't bear to look any longer. Instead, I found myself watching Lee Fu. He waited tensely, peering ahead and to windward with lightning glances. A wave caught us, flung us forward. Suddenly I heard him cry out at my side in exultation, as he bore down on the tiller. The cry was echoed from forward by a loud scream that shot like an arrow through the thunder, where Wilbur had sunk beside the rail. The sampan fell off, still carried high on the crest of the wave....

"Then, in a moment like the coming of death, we plunged into the reef. I have no knowledge of what took place; there are no words to tell the story. Solid water swamped us; the thunder of the surf crushed the mind.... But we didn't strike, there was a way through, we had crossed the outer margin of the reef. The sampan emerged from the breakers, remained afloat, slowly became manageable. The wind caught us again. Ahead stretched the suggestion of a channel. Ten minutes passed, ten minutes that seemed like as many ages, while we ran the terrible gauntlet of the reef, surrounded by towering breakers, lost in the appalling steady roar of the elements. Suddenly, without warning, we were flung between a pair of jagged ledges and launched forward bodily on the surface of an open lagoon.

"A low rocky island lay in the centre of the nest of reefs, a stretch of open water to leeward of it, all completely hidden from view until that moment. The open water ran for perhaps a couple of miles; beyond that, again, the surf began in another unbroken line. It would take us ten minutes to cross this lagoon ... another interlude.

"'Bring Captain Wilbur' said Lee Fu in my ear.

"I crept forward, where Wilbur lay beside the rail, his arm around a stanchion. He was moaning to himself like an injured man. I kicked him roughly; he lifted an ashen face.

"'Come aft—you're wanted' I cried.

"He followed like a whipped cur. Lee Fu, at the tiller, beckoned us to stand beside him. I pulled Wilbur up by the slack of the coat, and pinned him against the cross-rail.

"'This is the end' said Lee Fu, speaking in loud jerks, as he steered across the lagoon 'From this haven there is no way out, except by the way we came. That way, of course, is closed by the gale. To windward is shelter, ahead is destruction.

I will seek the shelter if you will speak. If not, I shall go on. By this time, Captain, you know me to be a man of my word'

"'You yellow devil!...'

"'Waste no time in recriminations. Beyond these reefs, Captain, lies the wreck of your ship, the *Speedwell.* I have brought you to see the scene. There my friend met death at your hands. You have had full time to consider. Will you join him beneath the waves, or will you return to Hong Kong? A word will save you. Remember, the moments pass very swiftly'

"'What about yourself and Nichols?' blustered Wilbur.

"'We go too ... or stay ... it makes little difference. This is a matter that you cannot understand. We do not care'

"At this juncture, I was fated to under-estimate Wilbur after all. I thought him broken; but a last flicker of obstinate pride remained, to prop his extraordinary ego. He pulled himself together again, and whirled on us.

"'I didn't do it!' he snarled. 'It's a damned, scoundrelly lie!'

"'Very well, Captain. Go forward once more, and reserve your final explanation for the gods'

"The flicker of pride persisted; Wilbur staggered off, holding by the rail. I waited beside Lee Fu. Thus we stood, like wooden images, watching the approach of the lagoon's leeward margin. Had Lee Fu spoken truthfully—was there no way out, in that direction? I couldn't be certain. All I knew was that the wall of spouting surf was at our bows, that the jaws of death were opening again.

"Suddenly Wilbur's head snapped back; he flung up his arms in a gesture of finality, shaking clenched fists into the sky. With a thrill that tingled to my fingertips, I realized that he was at the point of surrender. The torture had reached his vitals. He turned and floundered aft, holding his hands before his face like a man struck blind.

"'What is it I must say?' he cried hoarsely, in a voice that by its very abasement had taken on a certain dignity.

"'You know. The truth, or nothing!'

"His face was shocking in its self-revelation; a strong man breaking isn't a pleasant object. I saw how awful had been this struggle of the wills. He came to his final decision as we watched, lost his last grip....

"'I did it—as you said—you must know all about it. I suppose I sank her—I had no intention ... You madman! For God's sake, haul up, before you're in the breakers!'

"'Show me your insurance money' said Lee Fu inexorably.

"Wilbur dug frantically in an inside pocket, produced a packet of bank notes, and held them out in a hand that trembled violently as the gale fluttered the crisp leaves.

"'Throw them overboard'

"For the fraction of a second he hesitated; then all resolution went out in his eyes like a dying flame. He extended his arm rigidly, and loosed the notes. They were gone down the wind almost before our eyes could follow them.

"In the same instant, Lee Fu flung down the great tiller. The sampan came into the wind with a shock that threw us all to the deck. Close under our lee quarter lay the breakers, less than a couple of hundred yards away. Lee Fu made frantic signals forward, where the crew were watching us in a state of utter terror. I felt the centreboard drop; a patch of sail rose slowly on the mainmast. The boat answered, gathered headway, drove forward....

"It was just in time. We had run past the low island, and couldn't hope to regain its shelter in such a gale; but a pile of tumbled rocks lay off its leeward end, carving out a small sub-zone of protection. This spot we might be able to fetch, if we managed to escape the clutch of the breakers. Escape them we did, after a hair-raising five minutes, and threw out our anchors in the most precarious berth ever afforded, with our stern brushing the very fringe of the breakers. But the anchors held; and there we rode until the storm was over.

"Wilbur lay as he had fallen after the sampan's frantic plunge. He made no movement; and we, on our part, left him where he was"

X

"Two nights later, under a clear starry sky, we slipped through Lymoon Pass on the tail of the land breeze. Before we reached Wanchi, it fell flat calm. We shipped the long sweeps and began to row; the chattering crew, who'd never expected to see Hong Kong again, fell to work willingly. The lights of the city twinkled against the Peak, the sleeping fleet swung at anchor in the landlocked harbour; all was silence and tranquillity ... as we see it now. But that night, let me tell you, the familiar scene was invested with a poignant charm. At length we reached the bulkhead, from which we'd taken our maniac departure three days before, and settled in our berth as comfortably as if we'd just returned from a pleasure trip down the bay.

"No words were said as we came in. I sat against the bulwarks, almost afraid to move, like a man awakening to consciousness after a long siege of fever. A little forward of my position, Wilbur rose to his feet. He hadn't spoken or touched food

since that tragic hour under the reefs two nights before; had spent most of his time below decks, locked in a tiny stateroom, and had come out only in the last few minutes, as if in response to the nearing sounds of the land. He stood at the rail, a figure wrapped in silence and immobility, watching them berth the sampan. Then, without a glance in our direction, he walked to the gangway and stepped ashore. On the bulkhead he paused for a moment irresolute, turning and gazing across the harbour. His form stood out plainly against a bright light up the street. It had lost those lines of vigour and alertness; it was the figure of a different and older man. A broken figure, that could never again be the same....

"A moment later he had lurched away, vanishing suddenly in the darkness of a side street. Three days afterwards, we heard that he had taken the boat for Singapore. He hasn't been seen or heard of in this part of the world since that day.

"When he had gone, that night at the bulkhead Lee Fu approached me; we crossed the deck of the sampan, and stood for a long while silent at the harbour rail.

"'Thank you, Captain' said he at last 'As I foresaw, it has been supremely interesting. For your part, I hope you feel repaid?'

"'It's quite enough to be alive, just now' I confessed without shame 'I want to see a chart of that locality, Lee Fu. I want to find out what you did'

"'Oh, that? It was not much. The gods were always with us, as you must have observed. As for the rest of it, I know that region pretty well'

"'Evidently.... Did the *Speedwell* fetch up among those same reefs, or to leeward of them?'

"'The *Speedwell*? Captain, you did not believe my little pleasantry? We were nowhere near the wreck of the *Speedwell*, at any time—as Captain Wilbur should have known, had he retained his mental perspective'

"I smiled feebly. 'Well, I didn't know it. Tell me another thing, Lee Fu. Were you bluffing, there at the last, or was there really no passage through the reef?'

"'So far as I am aware, Captain, there was no passage. I believe we were heading for solid rock when we came into the wind'

"The answer surprised me. 'Would you have piled us up' I asked 'if Wilbur hadn't given in?'

"'That is a hypothetical question. I knew perfectly well that I should not be forced to do it. I was only afraid lest, in the final anguish, Captain Wilbur might lose his seaman's judgment, and so might wait too long. That, I confess, would have been unfortunate. Otherwise, there was no especial doubt or danger'

"'I'm glad to hear it!' I exclaimed, with a shudder of recollection 'It wasn't apparent at the time'

"'No, perhaps not. Time was very swift, just then. I will tell you now, Cap-

tain Nichols, that I myself had begun to grow alarmed. He waited very long. He was more wilful than I had fully anticipated; a strong, determined man, and an arch-criminal. But, as it chanced, this made it the more interesting'

"I didn't care to argue such a subtle point. 'What did you have in mind, Lee Fu' I asked 'before the typhoon shifted? Did you expect the centre of it to catch us?'

"The question seemed to amuse him. 'Captain, I had no plan' he explained in a puzzled tone 'It is dangerous to make plans, or to live according to a fixed design. There was a task to be begun; the determination of its direction and result lay with the gods. It was plain to me that I had been called upon to act; beyond that I neither saw nor cared to see. Action once begun, I seized events as they came my way.... How characteristic that you ask me for my plan! Would you have the temerity to inquire into the divine control of events? Or do you think that a man really may make a plan?'

"I could believe his statement only because I'd witnessed his incredible calmness.

"He waved a hand toward the city. 'Come, my friend, let us sleep' said he 'We have earned our rest—and that is something not always won from life. But beware of over-confidence, and never plan. It is by straining to see the future that men exhaust themselves for present usefulness. It is by daring to make plans that men bring down on their heads the wrath of heaven. We are the instruments of the gods; through us, they put their own plans in operation. The only failure in life is not to hear when the gods command. In this case, however, there could have been no question; the design was too apparent. From the first, I was sure and happy. There were constantly too many propitious signs'"

THE UNCHARTED ISLE

THE UNCHARTED ISLE

I

"They say the man is mad" I whispered, nodding across the room "Pendleton pointed him out to me in Wellington Street this morning"

Nichols gave his twisted smile. "Yes, mad, or inspired, or something very wonderful. Who is competent to judge? But I haven't seen him up this way for a long while. Another expedition must be on foot in search of the Uncharted Isle"

"What's that? You know him, then?"

"Perhaps I am the only man in the East who does know him, in the proper sense of the word. Every one else listens, laughs, and passes on. But I believe. Yes, in spite of ridicule and life's disaster, I continue to believe … well, not so much in the fact itself, as in the man. By Jove, he's faithful—and that, you must admit, is marvel enough. And his madness isn't entirely impossible; it can be explained. Yet it strikes the world as being funny—and that's his crowning misfortune. A man in search of a lost and apparently non-existent island can't help being a little ridiculous, I suppose, until he becomes a thundering bore. For no one else, of course, is looking for such a thing, or wants to find one. We keep safely within the charted area.... But let me tell you the story, and you can form your own opinion. Don't attract his attention; he won't notice us here in the shadow"

There used to be a certain tea-house in Hong Kong, the name of which was jealously guarded from touring vandals. It opened on the face of an enchanted terrace high above the harbour and the town; from the parapet the eye travelled inland over the low peninsula of Kowloon, as far as the foothills of China, the fringe of a mighty land veiled in mystery. Romance came to that terrace, filtering through lacy bamboo leaves, borne on the night breeze along with the fragrance of flowers and the music of hidden voices. The place wasn't a temple of the conventional. It isn't running now; the songs are still, the little cups no longer tinkle in the half-darkness, and no sweet, startled faces, peep out at visitors from behind the dragon-screens.

Nichols and I had been sitting there some time that evening, when the man came in. Of course Nichols knew him; who with any pretentious to a history wasn't catalogued in his omnivorous files? While I waited, I listened to a rapid conversation in Chinese somewhere in the back of the establishment. Dusk had swallowed the white houses and green slopes below us; the riding lights on the harbour had begun to prick out the berths of ships; with the coming of night, voices seemed hushed among the yellow lanterns.

"What is madness? Who will lay down the line between madness and sanity?" demanded Nichols suddenly "They are like right and wrong, or good and evil .... much as you want to believe. If we dared for a moment to face the logic of existence, I think we should find that we're all a little mad, each in his own way. An entirely sane man would sort of puff out, like a candle. It's our madness that keeps us going, feeds the flame. The world's an illusion, anyway, of course;

ergo, why aren't the maddest people the sanest? Certainly, the maddest man of all would be he who tried to define the states of the human mind.

"For that's beyond our province. They say, for instance, that Devereux is mad: what they mean is that they can't fathom him. His life, likewise, hasn't been charted. Well, what's the difficulty? All the lives and islands haven't been discovered yet. And there are certain bald facts, written in black-and-white records, that seem to support his claim…."

A waxy Chinaman changed our tea. Nichols gazed thoughtfully into the soft darkness beyond the terrace, getting his story under way.

"Devereux is no longer a young man, as you see" he began slowly "I'd say he was about our own age. He was born and reared, I believe, in our own New England, though I've never heard the name of his home town. I presume he had parents there once, brothers and sisters, maybe a sweetheart. The Devereuxs, you know, are a fine family, with strains of originality cropping out here and there, which might once in a while have amounted to genius in a free atmosphere. They're a high-strung breed. I'd be willing to affirm that, even before the episode of the island, this particular Devereux was a serious and romantic soul. Look at his face, hanging in the glow of that lantern. Temperament, sensibility, melancholy…. But what he was, and what he might have been, are both sunk in the tremendous distances of a lifetime, obscured by the apparition of an island, the wraith of a tragic destiny.

"He went to sea, in the wake of his generation. At the age of twenty-one, he had worked up from the forecastle to a room on the port side of the forward cabin; in due time he became first mate of the ship *Evening Star.* I forget who was captain of her, or what was the name of the second mate who managed to reach Callao in the whaleboat. Those who survived the disaster have vanished along with those who never returned, and Devereux alone has perpetuated the event in nautical history because of a madness that descended on him out of the sky.

"They sailed from New York for San Francisco in a year that is likewise immaterial, and had a long and tedious passage round the Horn. It was one of those unlucky and exasperating voyages, you know—calms, and even trade winds, and unseasonable storms; so that when they finally got headed north in the Pacific, they were a disheartened ship's company. The southeast trades in the Pacific failed them completely; whatever wind they found, from 20 south up to the line, came from the east and north; and with the best course they could make, the ship was crowded over far to the westward of the regular track. Then, as they approached the line, the northeast breeze settled down in earnest, and nothing for it but to hold her on a N.N.W. course, as close to the wind as possible on the starboard tack. They managed to weather the fringe of the South Sea Islands by a few hundred miles, and drifted across the line somewhere in the neighbourhood of 135° west

longitude. Provisions and water were holding out well, though one hundred and seventy-five days had passed since they'd lost sight of Sandy Hook.

"One evening in the early dog-watch, they noticed a few land birds flying about the ship. Devereux told me they were quite excited over the incident for an hour or two, with the quick sympathy of sailors for an unusual manifestation of life-forces. The nearest land at that time was the Marquesas, five hundred miles away to the southward. Some of the men tried to entice the birds to alight on deck or in the rigging, but they didn't seem at all weary, and scorned the blandishments of food.

"'Wonderful creatures—birds' said the captain, as they were discussing the occurrence on the quarter-deck 'Five hundred miles isn't a drop in the bucket to them. All the bob-o'-links at home go to Brazil and back every winter'

"'They've probably run over from the Marquesas since supper' chimed in the second mate 'Half an hour from now they'll be back there, perching on some tree above an island beauty. God, I'd like to be a bird!'

"But Devereux demurred to their conclusion—he knew something of the habits of birds. 'That's all right in the migrating season, but these birds don't migrate' said he 'You can see that they aren't bound anywhere in particular. And land birds don't fly five hundred miles to sea for the fun of going back again. They do get tuckered, too. I think it's mighty strange'

"He had the first watch. It was one of those typical Pacific nights—a velvet sky, a smooth sea, the air somehow expressing the character of an ocean illimitable and magnificent, an ocean that spreads like the floor of the universe. After the captain had gone below for the night, Devereux cast his imagination adrift to follow those birds, to see the land again. What could their visit have meant? Was there any land nearer than the Marquesas—perhaps an uninhabited island? He promised himself a careful survey of the chart when he went below at midnight.... He'd been thinking in this desultory fashion some time, lost in the dreams of night watches, when a sharp cry from forward struck him like a knife flying through the darkness.

"You know those single cries on shipboard, in the dead of night—cries of warning, of apprehension, of impending danger. The heart stops for a moment at the sound. Then a thousand possibilities crowd into the mind at once, a thousand processes of thought leap into action. There can be no indecision; moments are priceless. And there must be no mistake.

"The cry met him a second time as he passed the mizzen rigging, running forward. '*Breakers ahead!*' Instinctively, he shouted the order over his shoulder as he ran.

"'Put the helm down! *Hard down! Hard down!*'

"But it was too late to save her. He told me that he paused at the break of

the poop, listening, and in a sudden hush that went over the ship, heard distinctly a low sucking sound under the bows—the horrible gasping of water over rocks awash. He clung to the rail, cowed by the only fear a sailor knows. At that moment, she struck heavily, and stood still. She had been making about five knots, enough to give her plenty of momentum. The shock was terrific: some of the top-hamper crashed to the deck, and the voices of men suddenly broke out in screams of terror. The ship rose a little by the head, seemed to draw back, and surged forward again with a dull, rending, sickening plunge.

"But what's the need to rehearse the details of that oldest tragedy of the sea? There was time enough for them to get out the boats, time enough, even, to fully provision them—and that's more than some have been allowed. But the ship was dead and done for. Her whole bow must have been stove in under water. Five minutes after they pushed clear of her, she slumped like a rock, and they lost her in the darkness. A whirlpool of foam showed for a while on the surface of the black water. Then that, too, faded; and the wide, open Pacific received them in their three boats as frail as cockle-shells, and the velvet night covered it all.

"The captain commanded the longboat, the second mate and Devereux had a whaleboat apiece. Devereux's was the smallest; his crew consisted of six men besides himself. The boats drew together on the quiet water for a consultation. A deep stillness invested the place, the stillness of a lofty cavern, of an empty world; and somewhere off in the gloom that awful sucking sound went on, now loud, now dying out to a faint echo, like a demon chuckling over human disaster.

"All night they played hide-and-seek with that demon in the darkness. The breeze fell off, and after a while it grew flat calm. At times the voice of the reef was hoarse and low and languid; at times it purred and bubbled energetically; at times it would be silent so long that they'd lean over the gunwale to listen, thinking they had lost it—when unexpectedly it would snarl out again, close at hand. In the middle of the night they did seem to be really losing the sound, and were afraid they'd drifted from the vicinity; they bent to the oars rather aimlessly, for no one could judge the exact direction, and before they knew it were almost running afoul of the hideous thing. Some of the men swore that the sound moved on the water; this seemed plausible, for it was to be supposed that the reef extended a considerable distance, yet the notion nevertheless gave rise to a vague superstitious fear. Either it moved, or they were surrounded by a nest of reefs—one was about as bad as the other. Devereux said it was a night to drive a nervous man crazy, a night that they began to think would never end.

"When dawn came at last, they looked about them and saw nothing at all—nothing but an unbroken horizon, a boundless ocean, a few spars floating idly in the midst of a great calm, and a little dark dot like a pimple on the face of the waters, just in front of the rising sun.

"They rowed toward this pimple on the surface. It opened and closed with the sucking motion of a loose mouth, and between the monstrous flickering lips of water a point of rock protruded, black and swollen like the tongue of a drowned man. It seemed impossible that this solitary rock had made all the commotion of the night, had invested them as if with an army of breakers; yet there was absolutely nothing else in sight—the rest had been imagination.

"They rowed across the south face of the rock, where the ship had struck, and found the water there deep past all knowing. The rock wasn't coral, and no coral formation surrounded it. In the clear blue water beneath them huge banners of kelp waved and winnowed like lifeless hands. Not a vestige of the *Evening Star* remained; she had disappeared in the unfathomable gulfs of the Pacific. It was a mere crag that had caught her, a needle-point piercing the floor of an otherwise unobstructed ocean, the topmost spire of some mighty mountain sunk in the bowels of the world. It may never before have been seen by mortal man; it certainly wasn't indicated on the best charts of that day. She would have had to seek a thousand years to touch it. A ship's length either side would have cleared her....

"They waited beside the rock till noon, to get an observation. Then they rowed away to the northward, bound for the Sandwich Islands. The dark spot on the water dwindled and disappeared in their wake. Devereux told me that, quite unaccountably, he felt his heart sinking as they lost sight of it; after all, it was their only link with a remote and perhaps unattainable world.

"The first night after the disaster, a heavy squall separated the boats. They couldn't find each other, and never came together again. The second mate reached Callao after a terrible journey, the first to report the loss of the *Evening Star*. He had been nearly swamped in that first squall. For two days he had hunted frantically for the other boats. Then, not being a good navigator, and having a very imperfect chart of the Pacific Islands, he had changed his course and steered due east, knowing that he would strike the American continent if he could keep on going. The fact of his arrival in Callao, its date, and his reported date of the disaster, are beyond dispute; for my own satisfaction, I have looked these matters up in the official records.

"The captain, in the longboat, was never heard of again. Him and his crew the Pacific took for toll.

"Devereux was picked up at sea, alive, well, and alone in the *Evening Star's* small whaleboat, *exactly one year and three months after the ship went down*"

"Easy, Nichols!" I remonstrated "Say that again, please. You can't expect me to swallow it whole at the first try"

"Those are the facts, I tell you" said Nichols calmly "I have also verified this latter statement, through correspondence with the captain who picked him up.

It really happened—and the dates were as I said. He was picked up just north of the equator in the Pacific Ocean by the ship *Vanguard*, and brought in to San Francisco. I was informed by the captain of the *Vanguard* that he had been driven out of his course by meeting the northeast trade winds too far south, and had sighted Devereux adrift one morning in about 135° west and 2° north. The man was nearly dead from thirst, and was quite mad when they took him aboard; raved about an island nearby, said he'd been blown away from it, and begged them to cruise in search of it before they left the ground. There was no island in that vicinity, of course, nearer than the Marquesas. 'I was sorry for the poor fellow' the captain of the *Vanguard* wrote me 'but we couldn't waste time in indulging his fancy. He quieted down after a day or two, and seemed to settle into a sort of dull melancholy'

"This castaway, giving his name as Devereux, claimed to have been mate of the *Evening Star*, lost in that same quarter of the Pacific the year before. The people on the *Vanguard* had heard nothing of this disaster; in fact, the first report of it, brought in by the second mate, had just reached San Francisco from Callao when they got in. To corroborate the story, however, the whaleboat in which Devereux had been picked up had presented a battered and weather-beaten appearance, her paint peeling off and her bottom badly scarred, as if she'd been used a good while on the beach; and on her stern they had been able to decipher the letters—ENI-G—AR. Devereux claimed that his ship had touched a needle of rock and had sunk immediately; but no danger of that nature was laid down on the *Vanguard's* chart. A year later, as a result of these conflicting and sensational tales, the United States Government sent a gunboat to look for the rock, perhaps with secret instructions to keep a weather eye open for Devereux's island; but nothing was to be found. Devereux couldn't remember the *Evening Star's* exact latitude and longitude on the day before the disaster; his records and instruments had vanished along with his crew in the heart of a deep mystery. And the second mate, who alone came in in regular order, was a poor navigator, you'll remember, and may easily have made an error about the place of his departure. At any rate, nothing was to be found. On the charts of the Hydrographic Office to-day you'll see, in that position, a dotted circle, marked Evening Star Rock, with an interrogation point after the name.

"Devereux's story was a nine days' wonder in San Francisco, confirmed in substance as it was by the recent authentic report from Callao. The newspapers made good copy of it. Many believed him outright; a man doesn't float about in the Pacific for over a year and emerge from the experience in robust health, without there being some simple and practical explanation. Yet sensational publicity quickly prejudiced the case, as it invariably does. After the first flush of pleasurable excitement, public interest began to put him down either as a hoax

or a madman, and then promptly forgot him. One of the papers tried to start a subscription for a schooner, so that he might search for his island, but it met with little response. The return wave of prosaic life rolled over him, left him submerged and helpless. For a while he went about seeking sympathy and assistance, but his melancholy tale soon came to be a nuisance, doors were shut in his face, and men avoided him.

"At length he had the good sense to go away. He wandered to the East, moved about from place to place. The story followed him, distorted in the passage of time. And so we meet him here, a man with a strange hallucination—an interesting case, and romantic, but unquestionably mad"

II

Nichols leaned toward me, his eyes kindling. "Let me take you back to the morning after the squall that separated the boats" said he "The sun rose in a clear sky; the quick tropical storm had entirely disappeared. Devereux looked about him, and saw no sign of the others. One hardly realizes, until one has experienced the fact, how easy it is for boats to become separated in the night, especially under severe conditions of weather, or how rapidly a dozen miles may spring up between them. And a dozen might as well be as many hundreds, for all chances of their coming together again. The wind had died to a baffling breeze that seemed to be trying to blow from all directions at once. Devereux had no chronometer—nothing but a pocket watch, a sextant, a compass, and an old general chart of the Pacific. After an hour's study of his situation, he came to a quick decision. The chart and the pocket watch couldn't be trusted to get him to the Sandwich Islands; like the second mate, somewhere within a radius of twenty-five miles from him at that moment, he changed the boat's course and steered due east in search of a continent.

"While they were getting up the sail to catch a wandering air that seemed to have settled in the west, a man forward shouted in tones of horror that the water cask was empty. A frantic investigation verified the fact. An oar carelessly thrown down had loosened the plug in the head of the cask, and their precious supply of water was washing around in the bottom of the boat. They tasted it, but found it too salt to drink; the boat, fresh from the top of the forward house, was leaking quite a little.

"Then began the nightmare of heat and thirst. The sun that day was pitiless. They had no luck with the wind, which soon fell flat calm; the exertion of rowing added to the misery. Not a drop of rain fell. By noon, the horror of the first day's thirst had begun to grip them; by nightfall it had them cowed and broken, whining for water. It's that first day which is always the worst, you know—until the end. Devereux still hoped that he might pick up one of the other boats, and all hands kept a sharp lookout; but the hope died as the hours wore on. The sheer loneliness of the vast Pacific under a brilliant sun oppressed them like a foretaste of death, like a vista of eternity. They made little progress that day.

"A night passed, between sleeping and waking; dawn once more showed them a deserted sea. After a couple of hours' rowing, they threw down the oars in despair. What was the use of making little dabs with a wooden blade at an ocean beyond span or circumference? Devereux says that he, too, was completely disheartened. They rested all that forenoon, waiting for a breeze. By this time the thirst had eaten into their vitals. Spots were dancing before their eyes, and frequently one of the men would insist that he saw a boat on the horizon; but after a while they learned to accept the cruelty of this delusion.

"Some time a little after noon, Devereux was in the stern sheets steering; he had persuaded the men to take up the oars again. He was gazing off on the port quarter, in an aimless state of misery, when all at once he thought his mind must be breaking with the thirst. A vision swam before him—a vision of a peaceful island, fringed with palm trees, crowned by a low green hill, all shimmering with heat and inverted in the sky. He says he gazed at it a long time without daring to speak; he was afraid the others wouldn't be able to see it, afraid it wasn't real. Finally he could stand the suspense no longer.

"'Look!' he cried, pointing 'Is anything there?'

"And they saw it, too. For it was nothing but the mirage of an actual island, an indeterminate distance away. It hung in the sky like a mysterious apparition. They regarded it fixedly, with glances almost hostile, as if questioning its integrity; but the vision persisted. Then they turned the boat, and rowed like madmen throughout the afternoon. The mirage had faded in the course of an hour; but Devereux urged them on by arguments and promises, explaining the nature of the phenomenon and enlarging on their chances of deliverance. Hadn't they all seen it? It couldn't be far off; it must lie somewhere along the line of the compass bearing that he had taken.

"That night they rowed by watches, Devereux himself taking stroke oar with either crew. And when morning dawned, the real island lay right side up a couple of miles ahead, fair and alluring on the steel-blue rim of the sea. You can imagine the hoarse shout that went up from parched throats! Weak and wild, they struggled painfully at the oars; and shortly after sunrise the boat entered a little cove

that split the front of the island, where the ground swell at once dropped off under the shelter of a curving point of land. A few strokes more, and the surf caught them. A long roller flung them high up the beach—a lucky thing, for God knows they wouldn't have had the strength to save themselves. The roller went out, leaving them planted upright on a white coral strand; in the silence before the coming of another wave, they heard the drip of a little stream running down the hillside at the head of the cove. Water! They left the boat as she was, the oars cock-billed in the rowlocks, the sail, which they'd hoisted just before dawn and had been too weak or excited to take in, flapping loose across the gunwale, and ran with the last strength in their bodies toward the sound. The rivulet had cut a shallow channel in the coral, from the jungle to the water's edge; they threw themselves face downward, buried their mouths in the stream, and drank like animals.

"For some time afterwards they lay as they had fallen, saturated like so many sponges, feeling the water sink into their blood. Then Devereux, who had exercised his will power and drunk as sparingly as possible, got to his feet and turned toward the jungle. A second time he thought his eyes were deceiving him. A woman stood there in the half-shadow, still grasping the branches she had parted as she stepped out on the beach. She didn't appear frightened, but gazed at him frankly in wonder and admiration. He thought she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. His heart went out to her in that astonishing moment of their meeting, went out freely, without restraint or volition ... and she's held it ever since, and always will. One can hardly imagine, to see him sitting over there so dejectedly, that off on the floor of the Pacific, years ago, and utterly unseen of the world of men, he lived such a transcendent moment, that such a romance came to him under the sun that we all know. It takes one back to the days of Sinbad and Urashima and Oisin.

"He advanced toward her, making signs of friendliness—of affection, it's to be supposed. Their hearts were free as the air, and they went naturally, like God's children, into each other's arms. She remained unafraid ... so he discovered that she loved him, too. Their meeting at the head of the beach had been unobserved; they melted together into the jungle like creatures of the light, and the boughs that she'd parted as if opening the door of life silently closed behind them.

"A little later he returned to the beach and aroused his crew; the men had fallen into a sort of stupor as they lay in the hot sun. The girl led them inland to the main village of her people, where they were received like gods dropped from the sky"

Nichols leaned back in his chair, smiling crookedly. "The story of the advance of civilization" said he grimly "is the story of how savages have had to learn that white men aren't gods. It's an old story now—old and threadbare. It's been pretty nearly completely learned.... These people among whom Devereux and

his party had fallen had never seen a white man before. The story was all new and fresh to them. But owing to the wholly exceptional circumstances, its ending didn't run according to the usual distressful formula. In fact, it resulted in a real victory.

"The white men were very few, to begin with; and they couldn't call on their governments, at the head of the organized world, to support and further with mechanical engines of destruction their various lusts and designs. Happily, three of them died within a week after they had landed, from the effects of that first drink of water and the intemperate eating that followed. The other three, however, rapidly recovered strength and peccancy, and began casting their eyes on the women of the village. You know the ripe, luxuriant beauty of the Marquesan women: these people were of the same root stock. It wasn't many days before a number of violent outrages had been committed, which rang around the island—a couple of husbands murdered, maidens violated, and wives put to shame.

"Now, these people were moral, of course, after the wise and simple code of nature; and the chief of the village was a man of character and decision. He didn't waste time in parley; when the crimes were brought home beyond peradventure, and it was seen that the gods had turned to clay, he had the offending sailors taken into custody, and himself dispatched all three of them with the same club. Later their best parts were eaten at a feast of fairly legitimate rejoicing. Devereux was spared because he had behaved himself, and because of the love of the girl, who, it appears, was the chief's daughter.

"We've all dreamed of a life of truth and freedom; but few of us have both won it and lost it, in the brief span of a year. You should see Devereux's eyes kindle, while he tells you of it, while he's trying to convince you that he isn't mad. The people of this island had no traditions of their origin, no legends of visits from the outside world. It happens, through the fact of prevailing winds in the Pacific, that no sailing ship route passed near this region; steamers, also, gave it a wide berth, for it didn't lie between anywhere and anywhere. It was a place apart, visited by human agency only on the remotest chance. It may well be that during a period of many years the only two vessels to wander down those particular miles of waters were the ship that left Devereux floating on the ocean and the ship that picked him up in the same spot over a year later. Thus it was that the island had remained undiscovered, peopled by a race without knowledge of the world. They were honest and lovable children—much as God intended all of us to be, I suppose, much as we might have been if we hadn't found a way temporarily to surmount our destiny.

"The island itself was an emerald anchored in a field of cobalt, a jewel floating on the broad bosom of the sea. The rustling palm trees waved day and night before the steady trade winds; the air hung cool in the shadows, the white surf

broke on the reefs in constant thunder, and the tropical sunlight surrounded the gem like a halo of misty gold. Devereux lived there a year, and the love that came to him partook of the nature of the place—fresh, divine, alluring, rich with colour and meaning, pure as the light, true as the unchanging wind. A son was born to them. Nothing crossed their lives of sorrow or evil. They had forgotten time and its desperate occasions. The new day was but a repetition of the old.

"But I can't begin to show you half of the peace and beauty of that year. Ask me what the heart of man desires, and I'll answer that every element of it existed there on the island—conquest, honour, joy, creative impulse, love—enough for a dreamer or a doer, the wise design of nature with her uneasy and aspiring offsprings. Devereux grew to love the people; and because he seemed so different, yet conformed naturally to the island proprieties, they exalted him. And, marvellous to relate, he knew the worth of what he had found; he fulfilled the opportunity, he appreciated the honour, he was worthy of the romantic choice"

Nichols struck the table sharply with his fist. "Beware of too much happiness!" he growled "That's another lesson of a jaundiced civilization. It isn't expedient to embrace truth too hard.... Who could have conceived an existence safer than Devereux's, or one more likely to last? The broadest ocean in the world guarded him; the place of his retreat had never been discovered. The people adored him, the arms of a great love enfolded him; and he was glad to stay. What better ramparts could life have built for his defence? But fate, the old destroyer, willed it otherwise; and he was sent back to us, to an unbelieving world—to point some obscure moral, I suppose, perhaps in an attempt to show up all the hollowness and unreality ... if we only had the eyes to see.

"They had saved the whaleboat, of course; Devereux used to cruise about the island in her, catching wonderful fish, for he was a sailor at heart, and couldn't keep off the water. One day something led him far off shore—a speck on the horizon, which he'd no sooner seen than he wished to investigate. It looked like a piece of wreckage, or a boat; he became suddenly excited to think of finding traces of his fellow-men. Thus the devil with a memory lured him to destruction. The object was farther away than he had at first realized; it continued for a long while to look like a boat with a man's figure propped up in one end. But when he finally came up to it, he found nothing more interesting than a tree floating half submerged with a huge root that indeed resembled, even at close range, the fancy his mind had created.

"About this time it fell flat calm; he noticed a heavy squall gathering on the eastern horizon. He took down the sail and started to row with two short oars which he carried for an emergency. But four or five miles lay between him and the island; before he'd covered a third of the distance, the squall met him head on.

"It was one of those savage arch-squalls that occur on the fringe of the trade

winds once or twice in the course of a year. The island lay to windward of him; he didn't set the sail, of course, for he would have been unable to do anything but run before it. In fact, there was nothing left but to try to keep her head in the wind with the two short oars. The squall became more violent; a short choppy sea sprang up as if by magic, and spray flew from the wave-tops in blinding sheets. At last he had to give it up. He managed to save the oars; with one of them in his hand he scrambled aft. The boat sped around like a chip as his weight settled in the stern. Then she gathered headway, and he began to steer, running away from the island. Darkness was falling; he couldn't see how fast he was dropping the land. But his sailor's instinct told him all about it. As night closed in, he realized the worst; he and the whaleboat were being blown to sea.

"It seemed as if the squall would never end. The gale rushed at him for hours, a veritable hurricane of wind, accompanied by a deluge of warm rain. He was badly frightened, not so much for his physical safety as on account of his imagination. He says that during those long hours of tumult and darkness, a premonition of doom became as real to his fancy as if an actual spirit, an embodiment of disaster, had settled down out of the night to keep him company. He didn't feel alone—fate sailed with him.

"In the morning, the island had, of course, disappeared. The squall had at length passed over; the sea grew calm, and the hot sun burned down on the water. It remained calm all day, so that he couldn't use the sail. He rowed the heavy boat until his hands could barely touch the oars, steering as best he knew how by the sun. He had no compass, and his idea of the direction of the island was vague; the squall, he thought, had struck him from about E.S.E., but he couldn't be certain. It might have veered a point or two in the night, blowing him off at a new angle. And what did it matter?—for he couldn't pick out the points of the compass with the wind gone and the sun directly overhead. A horrible fear oppressed him that with all his frantic pulling he was shaping a course past the island. But which side—which side? As the day wore on, with no land appearing, this fear became a certainty.

"The second night was terrible; he had begun to comprehend the immensity of the ocean. He was lost on the Pacific. Nothing but a miracle of miracles would lead him back to the island. In his mind's eyes he saw a chart of the region; a dot marked the island, a smaller dot his present position—the rest was a waste of waters. Thousands of lines radiated from the smaller dot; these were the possible directions in which he might steer. Only three or four of them approached the island; the rest led nowhere.

"He remembered that he was far from the track of vessels. Not that he wanted to return to the world, but a vessel might help him to find the island. He was too full of life to want to die.... Scenes of the island crossed his mind

with poignant intensity. They would be searching for him in their frail dug-out canoes. The women would be wailing behind the village. Would his love believe that he had left her? No, he felt her faith, across the silence. In fancy, he saw her standing at the head of the beach, where she had first appeared to him. But her face now was drawn in wild sorrow, her streaming eyes ranged the horizon as if she would pierce the veil of death. He cried out to her; but the vast cavern of the sky swallowed his words.

"It would have been merciful to kill him there in the boat; hunger and thirst of the body are nothing, are soon over with. But think of the surpassing cruelty of saving him! Great pains were taken to that end; winds were manipulated, a ship was selected and driven from her course; it was as if the elements had conspired together and the whole machinery of the universe had paused a moment for the consummation of the act. On a certain morning he was sighted from the quarter-deck of the *Vanguard*; an hour later he was picked up, half dead from thirst, and babbling of an island—as mad as a hatter, of course, since the nearest land was the Marquesas, five hundred miles away"

III

"I've often tried to imagine Devereux's outlook on life, as he begged the captain of the *Vanguard* that morning to turn his ship about and institute a search for an uncharted island. How the refusal must have stunned him, with the reality still a living presence in his heart. By Jove, you know, the smell of the land lingered in his nostrils as if he'd just that moment left it; he could hear the voices, could feel the touch of lips that were barely parted from his.... But they were rough and practical on board the *Vanguard*; they had to be, for weren't they sailing in the employment of a strictly ordered enterprise? They laughed at him, and held their course. It was then that he began to hate a world that wouldn't listen. He's used to it now; like the savages, he has learned his lesson. And his interpretation of it is accepted only as a further indication of his madness. He says simply that we have lost our souls.

"On the top of this, came the experience in San Francisco. To have his hopes raised so high, only to be shattered overnight when public interest threw down the new plaything, was the final stroke of disillusionment. He went back to the sea; this was his only means of livelihood, and in spite of the romantic hallucination he

remained a good sailor. The ship on which he sailed from San Francisco took him south through the Pacific, along the route of homeward bound vessels. This, of all Pacific sailing routes, strikes nearest to the region where Devereux had been lost and found. But it doesn't run quite far enough to the westward actually to cross it. Devereux went to the captain, told him straight-forwardly the inwardness of his trouble and adventure, and begged him to shift the course a little—just to run to leeward, so that they might strike the longitude of the place. He didn't ask to waste any time in search. But the captain, who'd heard about his mate before he shipped him, saw nothing in this but a mild outcropping of the madness, and of course couldn't listen to the appeal. Running a ship to leeward was a matter of dollars and cents.... So they drew near the island, passed it a few hundred miles away, and left it astern as they picked up the southeast trades.

"This was the first of many voyages; he remained in the San Francisco trade for several years. Half a dozen times he passed the island, always leaving it far to leeward; and the memory didn't grow cold. Rather, it burned warmer and higher under this harrowing tantalization, a flame fed by hope and clarified by love. Some time, if he waited patiently, the elements would be propitious, the right chance would come.

"But he, too, became practical about it, recognizing that until he was his own master he wouldn't be free to seize a chance if it came his way. He saved his money, and worked hard to advance his reputation. In due time he was rewarded with the command of a little barque. For a number of voyages his owners sent him to the China Sea; it was at this time that I first met him, to fall under the spell of his romantic destiny. At last, however, he arrived in Singapore one voyage to learn that he'd been chartered to carry coals from Newcastle, New South Wales, to San Francisco. He felt a wonderful elation at the news. It looked like his long-awaited opportunity.

"In the natural order of things, you know, on the passage from Newcastle to California, he would cross the Pacific in the westerlies below the southeast trades, strike north through the trade winds close hauled on the starboard tack, fetch within a reasonable distance of the coast of Mexico, pick up the northeast trades there, and take a weatherly departure for the last stage of the journey. By crossing the equator in 135° west longitude he would be thrown to leeward heavily on that last stage. But he must chance it; no one would know, and he could make his easting in the North Pacific, above the trades. Chance it?—he couldn't have failed to accept the opening, his whole life was centred on the play. God knows, he'd waited long enough, devotedly enough, for deliverance from this protracted anguish, for the resumption of happiness, for another glimpse of the form of love and beauty, for a sight of the island that more and more appeared to him in the nature of a vivid dream.

"And, by Jove, when he got there, he couldn't find it! It didn't seem, to be in existence any longer; at least, it wasn't to be discovered in the region where he had expected to come across it. He couldn't remember the exact latitude and longitude, you'll remember, although he had an approximate position which ought to have served the purpose. He cruised in the locality for over a week, backward and forward, around and around, combing every square mile of its waters; but he saw no sign of land. He had a terrible feeling that he might have passed it by night, that if the night could have been turned to day he might have caught a glimpse of it on the distant horizon. It was at night, he says, that the sense of its nearness was most acute, an ethereal presence lying all about him in the soft, impenetrable obscurity. At times he could almost smell the land. He felt that she, too, had remembered, and had remained faithful to him; that the pain and longing in her heart hung in mysterious vibrations about the island, to guide him to her if ever he came that way. But, as of old, he couldn't tell the direction; it was always his bitter fate to lack a compass at the crises of life. He didn't find either the island or the rock that had split the *Evening Star*; and in the end he had to go away.

"He tried again, some years later, but with the same lack of success. I have an idea that his latitude and longitude were away off; yet the place where he had been picked up was exact enough. Or perhaps ... But what's the use of speculating on a hypothesis without tangible grounds? He couldn't find the island. *He* is the story—as you see him over there.

"By this time a hopeless melancholy had settled on him; yet he persisted in what he conceived to be the main business of life. His faith, indeed, was unquestioning; he apparently couldn't have done otherwise, and all his days and designs arranged themselves around this central purpose as naturally as mists rise to the sun. He left the sea, and went into the pearl fishing enterprise down on the north coast of Australia. He wanted to make money—and he made it. As soon as he possessed the means, he bought a schooner, fitted her up for a year's cruise, and disappeared over the eastern rim of the Pacific. It was well over a year, in fact, before he turned up again.

"I happened to be in Singapore when he arrived from that first cruise. Going down the Jetty late one afternoon to lake my sampan, I met him wandering in the opposite direction. One look at his face told me that he'd failed again. He had come in at noon, wasn't going anywhere, didn't know what he wanted to do. I took him aboard with me to supper, and we had a long evening on deck under the awning.

"'Devereux, has it ever occurred to you that the island may have sunk in a volcanic disturbance?' I suggested, after he'd gone over the affair for the twentieth time.

"The idea gave him comfort, strange as it may seem; he could contemplate

the entire destruction of his beloved as an event of minor importance. It offered something to fall back on, in his mental agony; a practical explanation to dull the edge of the frantic feeling that all the while the island existed, if he could only find it. When I noted how he devoured the suggestion, I enlarged on its possibility.

"'You see, you haven't been able to find the rock, either' I pointed out 'And I remember you told me there wasn't any coral formation in the neighbourhood of that rock. A sure sign of recent volcanic activity. I'd be willing to bet that it hadn't been on the surface very long; it had been poked up recently for your especial benefit. And where volcanic action is busy poking things up, it's just as liable to sink them down again'

"'But the island had been there a long while' he objected 'It had a coral reef all the way round; our boat crossed it by a miracle that morning. And the people, Nichols—people don't rise full grown from the sea, or drop down out of the air'

"I wondered whether they didn't, in this case. 'Never mind, this was the way of it' said I 'The rock was an indication of volcanic action that hadn't yet extended to the island. But the whole area was in danger, and the next outbreak, which happened to be one of depression, dragged down the island, too'

"We left the question pending, and went our various ways. Now and then I'd run into him, wandering about the world, as the years went by. He's never wholly given up the search. The singular thing about it is that material fortune has fairly pursued him. He's made a lot of money, and sunk it all in fruitless expeditions. Too bad it is that he didn't possess a scientific bent; he knows all there is to know of the Pacific islands on their practical side—that is, on the side that isn't worth knowing"

Nichols struck the table again. "Well, what do you think of it?" he demanded "There he goes, now—alone, always alone. Why was he sent back to us? What's his obscure moral? Do you get any hint?"

"Nichols, do you yourself believe in the reality of this island?" I asked.

He glanced at me keenly. "Isn't that wholly beside the point?" said he "I don't believe the island exists to-day, if that is what you mean. But there's a year in an open boat, back at the beginning of the record, to be explained. The point is that he believes in the island. By Jove, he remembers it—do you understand? See that droop in his back, as he stands absently looking out of the door? He's growing old, and the woman would be past middle age to-day, and the boy would be a man; but they have a trick of remaining young in his memory. Oh, he faces the fact, of course, in his practical moments; wonders what they have come to, whether the boy ever matured, whether the woman waited, or gave him up for lost and married another man. He can speak about these things, because he's quite determined to believe that the island is sunk under the ocean, that they're all dead. But when the moon's out, and he gets to dreaming, they come back to him just

as he left them, a young and beautiful woman with a child at her breast, both of them perfectly alive. How can you ask me … whether I believe in the island?"

IV

The day following this conversation, Nichols introduced me to Devereux; I met and talked with him several times before I left Hong Kong. If he was mad, the fact didn't affect his daily intercourse. He was a man of charming personality; a man who held something back, of course, but this merely added interest to the charm. Only his eyes were strange; as he talked, they invariably wandered upward, and were recalled to the scene in intermittent sharp flashes.

Then I left Hong Kong, and forgot all about him for a couple of years. At the end of that time I found myself in Batavia on business, when who should arrive but Nichols in the barque *Omega.* I left a message for him at his broker's, and that evening he called on me at the hotel. Already, I had determined to ask him for a passage north.

"But it'll take me a couple of months to reach Hong Kong" he told me "I'm going from here to Macassar, then on up the straights to Cebu and Iloilo"

"Time is no object to me" I answered.

"Good" said he "I'll be glad enough of your company. I have one passenger already, but he's hardly exhilarating. It's Devereux—you remember him. The fellow who lost an island in the Pacific"

"Yes, indeed. How is he now?"

"He's in bad shape" said Nichols, tapping his head significantly "I've had him aboard the round trip, for his health, but it hasn't seemed to help him. I'm afraid he is really breaking up, this time"

So it was arranged that I accompany Nichols northward. I went off on board with him that night, to enjoy the fresh sea-breeze in the outer roads. There I renewed my acquaintance with Devereux in more intimate circumstances.

The change in him was decidedly noticeable. His manner was odder, more distrait; throughout the evening he sat with his chair pulled close to the side, speaking only when spoken to, gazing off into the night and drumming constantly on the rail with his hand. We sailed from Batavia in a couple of days. Quite abruptly, on the morning of our departure, Devereux approached me with a new manner, as if anxious to enter into confidences. The anchor had just fetched away,

the ship had begun to turn on her heel. Something had moved him to the depths, some gleam of colour, some distant view of the palm-covered islands in the offing. He stopped me in the weather alley-way, his delicate features working with a powerful emotion.

"I've tried…" he began; then broke off for an instant, and drew nearer. "You know, I hardly said good-bye" he told me impressively "I went off in a great hurry that morning" He gazed at me profoundly, like a man looking at his own image in a mirror. "Do you know the Pacific?" he suddenly demanded.

"Not very well" I answered "I've been to Honolulu, and New Caledonia. Nothing in between"

"Oh…" he murmured "Then I must tell you" Without warning, he plunged into a relation of his own tale. I listened politely, then curiously, then with growing excitement. The tale transported him, inspired him. It was poetic drama, tragic and magnificent, that I heard; scene after scene unfolded itself before me as he talked, made real by his unconscious perfection of detail, and invested with truth by his air of fervour and simplicity. I saw the island in bold outline, in vivid colouring; I felt the hunger and thirst, and tasted the water that they found there on the beach; I looked up with him to behold the woman of his dreams. His dreams, or his memories—which was it? Had there ever been an island? The question seemed never so baffling as at that moment, when his present madness stood so openly revealed.

After this experience he retained me in his confidence—didn't want to talk about anything else but the vision that he saw and the sorrow that lay on his heart. It was very distressing. One morning as I came up the companion-way after breakfast, he plucked me nervously by the sleeve.

"Look here" said he, leading me to windward "Nichols knows the position of that island. He's trying to pass it…"

"Nonsense, Devereux!" I exclaimed "You mustn't credit such a thought. Nichols knows less about it than we do"

"He's always poring over the chart" said Devereux darkly "He tries to keep our position from me. Oh, I can see it in his eye!"

"But we aren't in that part of the world" I argued, like a man wrestling with the wind.

He passed a hand wearily across his eye. "It looks the same" said he. Suddenly he shot at me a piercing glance. "I don't know whether to believe you or not!" he snarled "You're all against me, every damned one of you!"

He quickly dropped the mood of suspicion, however, for that evening we had another long talk about the island. The next forenoon he took a notion to go aloft; spent a number of hours perched on the main royal yard. There we could see him steadily searching the horizon. We seized the opportunity to talk over

his case at length in the cabin, but could come to no decision except to let affairs run their course.

"Good Lord, Nichols, suppose he really sights an island, up there!" I suddenly exclaimed. We bent over the chart, pricking off our exact position that morning; and breathed a sigh of relief to discover that, as we were going, we shouldn't sight any land till the following day.

It was in Macassar that we saw the first evidence of violent abberration in Devereux. The three of us had gone ashore for the day; after an early dinner, we were taking a short drive in the cool of the evening through a region of small rice and coffee plantations. Somewhere beyond the outskirts of the town, a native woman stepped from the road in front of us to make way for our horses. She drew back against a fringe of bamboo trees by the roadside, stretched out her arms to part the branches behind her, and stood there motionless, in sharp relief against the sunset, watching us pass by. Beside us, Devereux uttered a wild cry, some unintelligible name, and leaped from the moving vehicle.

We found him prostrate at the feet of the woman, babbling in a musical, strange tongue. The light on his face was the very madness of joy. The woman shrieked, drawing back among the bamboo stems. Nichols reassured her in the Bugis dialect.

"Devereux, come away!" he commanded sharply "You don't know her. For God's sake, come away!"

Devereux got up slowly, gazing at us in wild alarm; then held out his arms to the woman. She struggled farther back into the bamboo thicket. Again he turned to us, drew himself together, and spoke with authority and defiance.

"She is my wife!" said he.

It was pathetic and terrible—the very devil of a scene. He fought and struggled; we had to take him to the carriage by main strength. A crowd had gathered. At last Devereux grew quiet. Nichols explained as best he could to the woman, while half a hundred ears listened eagerly to the astonishing tale. A rapid colloquy ensued; though I couldn't understand the words, I heard the woman's voice melt with pity.

"She wants to know whether your wife had a birthmark on her bosom" Nichols interpreted, turning to the carriage.

Devereux shook his head; he was still dazed with the struggle. The woman left cover, and came close to the carriage without fear. The upper part of her sarong slipped down, disclosing a broad red blotch on the dusky skin above her right breast. Leaning forward, she spoke a few words in a soothing voice.

"She says that you must be mistaken" repeated Nichols "She says she is sorry—but now you have seen that it cannot be"

Devereux stiffened in his seat, and the light suddenly went out of his eyes.

He gazed at her a moment like a rudely awakened somnambulist. Then he slumped in the corner, as if felled by a sharp invisible blow. The woman nodded to us, and we drove rapidly away.

He was ill for several days after that, keeping close in his room. When he was able to come on deck again, we had reached well across the Celebes Sea, and were about to make Sibutu Passage on the coast of Borneo. We watched him anxiously that forenoon for signs of a return of his malady. But he'd evidently forgotten the incident in Macassar; he talked with us all day in a normal manner, without reference to his affairs. It seemed as if the worst of the attack was over.

A long, narrow island lies on the west side of Sibutu Passage, clear of the mainland and hiding several smaller islands behind it. This was sighted while we were at dinner that noon; when we came up for our cigars, it stood in plain view on the lee bow. Being an island against the main, with land rising behind it as we came on, we didn't think of it as a possible new source of excitement. As the afternoon passed, however, Nichols called my attention to Devereux, who was acting strangely again. For a while he would lean against the lee rail, talking rapidly to himself; suddenly he would leave that off and take to pacing the deck in short, quick turns, rubbing his hands together. His eyes, it was to be noticed, kept watching the island, now less than four miles away. His face worked with nervous energy. His whole air was one of suppressed excitement, mingled with a certain quiet elation.

"He's using that Polynesian dialect!" Nichols exclaimed in a worried whisper "What can we do with him? We must pass the island"

"Can't you stop there long enough to set him ashore—convince him that it isn't his island?" I suggested.

Nichols considered soberly, then shook his head. "It wouldn't work" said he "First place, the currents are bad, there's no harbour or village, and no anchorage, so far as I'm aware. Second place, would anything convince him? Even if there was once a real island, mightn't this one, in his present condition, look as good as the next to him? Suppose he were to insist on a hunt for the inhabitants? We'd have to bring him away in the end—and that might only prolong the agony"

"I guess you're right, Nichols; but what's the alternative?"

"Tack ship, and stand away till night" he answered without hesitation "Slip through the passage under cover of darkness. Trust to luck that he'll change the mood again tomorrow, and forget what he saw this afternoon. We can get him to sleep somehow—drug him if necessary"

"But he'll make a row at once, when you tack ship"

"I suppose so. We'll have to play him at his own game"

It seemed the better plan, and Nichols acted on it immediately. Devereux, lost in his own sphere of unreality, didn't discover that the ship was coming about

until the island began to change its position along the rail. He watched it a moment, looked up to see the sails flat aback, then turned in alarm and ran toward the stern.

"What are you doing?" he cried "You can make the anchorage on this tack. The cove lies just round that first point"

"I know" said Nichols easily "But it's getting late, and I am afraid of the reefs. The channel is narrow, the wind's dying, the currents can't be trusted around that entrance. I'm going to stand off and on all night, and wait for the morning"

"Nonsense!" urged Devereux "We could easily make it! Why, Nichols, I know that channel like a book. There's plenty of daylight left...."

"Sorry, old fellow, but I just don't dare try it" said Nichols decisively, throwing into the words all the power of his normality "You must remember that I have the ship on my hands"

Devereux regarded him sourly, in a sort of hostile dejection. His case throughout was marked by a singular docility, as if all things assumed an illogical aspect to him, and were to be met by circumlocutory methods. "Well, I suppose your word is law" he allowed "But its damned hard on me. I've waited a good many years, Nichols, for this night" Without deigning to discuss the matter further, he went off down the companion like a sulky child. Following him a few moments later to reconnoitre, I found the door of his stateroom tightly closed.

He didn't appear at the supper table; as the evening passed it seemed evident that he wasn't coming out again. We began to have hope of getting through the night without another painful scene. When I looked into his room after supper and found him sound asleep in the bunk, it seemed too good to be true. Nichols at once tacked ship again, and we stood back toward Sibutu Passage.

Our plan for slipping through under cover of the darkness, however, had failed to reckon with the moonlight; that both of us had forgotten it is a good indication of the state of our minds. For the night, when it settled down, was positively radiant. A great soft moon hung high in the heavens, flooding the sea with a subdued glare, and revealing every detail of the land as we came abreast of the point of the island shortly after midnight. Sleep was out of the question. Nichols, of course, had to navigate the ship through the intricate passage. Thus it became my duty to run below every little while, keeping a watch on Devereux's door. But no sound or movement came from the closed room.

We had already forged past the main point of the island, which lay abaft the lee beam, less than half a mile distant, when I started on this errand for the last time. Going down the companion, I was struck by an uneasy feeling, and found myself hurrying through the entry. When I reached the cabin, Devereux's door stood open, a black hole in the dim light of the swinging lamp above the chart table. A glance into the room showed me that he was no longer in the bunk. I ran

to the forward cabin door, but seeing no one out there, turned and jumped up the after companion on the dead run.

"Have you seen Mr Devereux come on deck?" I cried to the helmsman.

"No, sir"

Nichols, at the stern rail, had heard my question, and ran forward to meet me. "Isn't he in his room?" he asked.

"No. I can't find him anywhere in the cabin. Must have gone up the forward companion"

Together we hurried forward along the weather alley. Reaching the corner of the house, where the main deck opened before us, we made out two men standing to leeward of the mainmast, apparently in earnest conversation. One seemed eager, excited; the other was evidently on the defensive. Devereux and the mate, we saw the next instant. It crossed my mind that the mate was ignorant of the intimate details of Devereux's malady; he wasn't the sort of fellow to take into confidential relations.

We heard his voice, now, sharply raised, as if in a final attempt to quell the other's insistence.

"But we aren't going to stop here, I tell you! There's nothing to stop for, no place to call…."

"*Not going to stop?…*" Devereux repeated wildly. He turned toward the rail, holding his arms stiffly outstretched in a gesture of utter distraction. Who can imagine the thoughts that leaped through his brain at that moment, or fathom the depths of the disappointment that suddenly crushed his already broken mind?

"Look out" cried Nichols at my elbow "Don't let him get away!"

But it was already too late; Devereux had heard the warning, too, and accepted it as a challenge. With a wild cry that seemed to tremble among the upper sails and echo back from the wooded heights of the island, he leaped forward, dodging the mate, and gained the bulwarks just abaft the fore preventor backstay. For an instant he stood there, silhouetted against the bright track of the moonlight, confronting the vision that was reality—then plunged with a magnificent abandon, and disappeared under the silvery surface of the water.

We saw him strike out toward the island. The ship forged ahead, carrying the moon-track with her; before we could get out a boat, he had vanished in the shrouded wastes astern. We sought for a night and a day, but could find no trace of his body. In that swift current setting seaward, it was impossible that he could

have reached the land.

SERVANT AND MASTER

SERVANT AND MASTER

I

"Steward!"

"Yes, sir, Cappen"

The little old Chinaman looked up from the brass threshold that he was polishing. Kneeling at the entrance to the forward cabin, with his back toward Captain Sheldon, he peered round his shoulder with a gnome-like movement, his hands pausing on the brass.

Captain Sheldon laid down his book. He pointed an accusing forefinger at the stateroom threshold, which the steward had just finished.

"That's dirty, Wang. You haven't half polished it. What's the matter with you lately?"

"All light, Cappen, all light. Eye gettee old"

He shifted his pan of brick-dust, scuttled across on his knees to the stateroom threshold, and attacked the brass again. With head bent low and hands flying, he worked silently. His back disclosed nothing beyond the familiar mechanical impersonality.

Captain Sheldon watched him with narrowing eyes. He realized that he was beginning to "get down on" the old steward; yet to his mind there was justice in the feeling. Wang wasn't so neat or careful as he used to be. He frowned as he noted the greasy collar of the Chinaman's tunic. A dirty steward!—he had always abhorred the notion. To his strict ideas of nautical propriety, it meant the beginning of a ship's disintegration. The time was not far distant, he saw clearly, when he would have to get rid of old Wang.

He had inherited the steward along with the ship *Retriever* when his father died. "Wang-ti, His Mark" the entry had stood voyage after voyage on the ship's

articles; young John Sheldon had grown up taking the venerable Chinaman for granted. He was the "old man's" trusted servant, as much a part of the vessel as her compass or her keel. He took entire charge of the ship's provisioning, as well as of the cabin accessories. He kept the commissary accounts, with never a penny out of the way; his prudence and honesty had saved the ship many a dollar. John often used to hear his father boast that be wouldn't be able to go to sea without Wang-ti.

In his boyhood on shipboard, there had existed a natural intimacy between the captain's son and the factotum of the nautical household. John's mother was dead, he roamed the ship wild from forecastle to lazaret; and Wang had guarded his fortunes with the wise faithfulness that knows how to keep its attentions unobserved. The captain had even permitted his son to sit in the steward's room, watching him smoke a temperate pipeful of opium after the noon dishes were done; this was the measure of his trust in the old Chinaman.

Indeed, John Sheldon, had he been disposed, might have recalled a great deal that went on in Wang's narrow room on the port side of the forward cabin—incidents fraught with deep importance to boyhood. The room was a place of retreat, a zone of freedom. It made little difference whether Wang were there or not, the two understood each other, conversed only in monosyllables, and the Chinaman apparently took no interest in what the boy did. In return, the boy throughout this period never so much as made an inquiry into Wang's life; that matter, too, was taken for granted. Many an afternoon he would lie for hours on the clean, hard bed, his head buried in a book, while the steward sat beside him on a three-legged wooden stool, sewing or figuring his accounts, neither of them speaking a word or glancing at the other. The click of the stone as the Chinaman mixed his ink, the rustle of the pages, and the faint creak of the wooden finish in the cabin, would mingle with the fainter sounds aloft and along decks as the vessel slipped quietly through the water.

But this was long ago, before life had opened, before days of responsibility and authority had overlaid youthful sentiment with a hard veneer of efficiency. The door of that room had closed on John Sheldon for the last time when he left the ship in New York, a boy of thirteen, to spend a few years at home in school; he was not to share another hour with Wang until the final hour. When next he joined the *Retriever's* company, it was in the capacity of a rousing young second mate of seventeen, broad shouldered and full of confidence, believing that his place in life depended on strength and self-assertion. He picked quarrels with the crew largely for the sake of fighting; he was aggressive and overbearing, as befitted the type of commanding officer that appealed to his imagination. In him, real ability was combined with a physical prowess beyond the ordinary; he failed to meet the reverses that teach men of lesser combative powers a much-needed lesson, and

the years conspired to develop the arbitrary side of his character. As an instance of this unfortunate tendency, he had allowed himself, after rising to the position of first mate on the *Retriever*, to quarrel with his father over some trifling matter of discipline; so that at the end of the voyage he had quitted the deck on which he had been brought up, and had shipped away in another vessel.

It was on the voyage immediately following this incident that his father had died suddenly at sea, half way across the Indian Ocean on the passage home. John Sheldon had arrived in New York from the West Coast almost in company with the *Retriever*, brought in by the mate who had taken his place. The first news he heard was that his father had been buried at sea. The ship was owned in the family; it seemed natural, in view of this stroke of destiny, that he should have her as his first command. The officers left, he took possession of the cabin and the quarterdeck that had been his father's province for so many years; and Wang continued his duties in the forward cabin as if nothing had happened. The Chinaman had nursed Captain Sheldon when he took to his bed, had found him dying the next morning, had heard his last words, and had laid out his body for burial.

Six years had passed since then. John Sheldon was a dashing young shipmaster of twenty-seven; and now Wang was failing. No doubt about it. The dishes weren't clean any longer; a greasy knife annoyed Captain Sheldon almost as much as an insult. Lately, he had begun to notice a heavy, musty smell as he passed by the pantry door. A dirty steward!—it wasn't to be supported, not on his ship, at any rate.

The Chinaman finished the brasses, gathered up his pan and rags, and started for the forward cabin. Captain Sheldon laid down his book again.

"Steward, have you got a home?"

"Oh, yes, Cappen. I got two piecee house, Hong Kong side"

Wang paused in the doorway, turning half round and steadying himself as the ship lurched. His fingers left a smudge on the white paint. As if perceiving it, he wiped the place furtively with the corner of his cotton tunic, only spreading the smudge. Captain Sheldon, watching the manoeuvre, sniffed in disgust, and continued the inquiry.

"Have you got a wife?"

"She dead, seven, eight year"

"Any children?"

"Oh, I got some piecee children, maybe three, four"

"For God's sake, don't you know how many children you've got?"

"Yes, sir, Cappen. I got four piecee, all go 'way. Maybe some dead. I no hear"

"Hm-m" The captain knit his brows ponderously, a habit he had acquired

in the last few years, and fixed a severe glance on the old Chinaman. "Don't you ever want to go home?"

"Oh, no, Cappen. Why fo' I go home? I b'long ship side"

After waiting a moment in silence for further questions, Wang realized that the conversation was not to be concluded this time. He turned slowly and shuffled off through the forward cabin, head bent and eyes peering hard at the floor. Captain Sheldon did not see him stumble heavily against the corner of the settee.

In the protection of the pantry, Wang put down the pan of brick-dust and stood for a long time motionless, holding the dirty rags in the other hand, facing the window above the dresser. He could see the small square of light plainly, but the rest of the room was vague. His tiny, inanimate figure, in the midst of the dim clutter of the room, expressed a weary relaxation; he stood like a man lost in vacant thought. No one would have suspected the feelings behind the wizened face; Wang's countenance, as he gazed steadfastly at the square of light, was an expressionless blank. He seemed scarcely to breathe; the spark of life seemed to have sunk low within him, to have retreated in fear or impotence. The hand holding the rags paused rigidly, as if petrified in the act of putting down its grimy burden. Had Captain Sheldon come upon him at that moment, he would have ordered him shortly to get busy, begin to do something.

All his thoughts, in the silence of the pantry, were of loyalty. That uncommunicative intimacy of the past had been fruitful to one, at least, of the parties to the contract. "Young Cappen" who as a boy had been Wang's pride and charge, was his pride and charge still. Had not "Old Cappen" on his deathbed, whispered the final order "Keep an eye on the boy, Wang. He's stepping high now—but the time may come when he will need you" But of these words, his father's last utterance "Young Cappen" of course knew nothing. They remained a profound secret between Wang and the dead.

If it were true, Wang recognized in that unwavering gaze, that his days of usefulness were over, he would no longer be able to discharge this obligation. Not that his strength was less; his withered, cord-like sinews ached to scrub and polish, to keep his domain in its old efficient order. But this voyage he hadn't been able to see what needed to be done. He had hardly dared allow his mind to formulate the explanation. But now he must face it. He was going blind.

He comprehended fully the meaning of the recent conversation in the after cabin. The pain that held him inert and motionless was half of love and half of fear. Perhaps, he tried to tell himself "Young Cappen" was now safely launched on the sea of life; perhaps he no longer had need of an old man's service. Yet, in the same moment of thought, Wang knew that this was not the fact. The knowledge filled him with a desperate tenacity; until fate actually laid him low, he could not submit to the turn of fortune. Old and wise in life, he realized that "Young

Cappen's" hardest lessons still lay ahead of him. He must serve as long as he was able.

That night over the supper table, Captain Sheldon opened a biscuit; there was a dead cockroach in it. His knife had cut it in halves. He threw the biscuit down in disgust. Wang always made the cabin bread.... Well, why didn't the old fool take it away? He must have seen the incident. Captain Sheldon knew that he was standing a few feet away in the pantry door. Taking up his plate, he snapped over his shoulder

"Steward!"

Wang was at his elbow in an instant. The captain thrust the biscuit into his trembling hand.

"Look at that! Take them all away, and bring some bread"

"Yes, sir, Cappen" The Chinaman mumbled incoherently, trying to cover his confusion. His innate sense of the etiquette of human relations, which even after fifty years of service had not accommodated itself to the brusque callousness of European manners, felt bitterly outraged; no way had been left him to save his face. Yet other and stronger emotions quickly submerged the insult. The biscuit plate rattled like a castanet as he set it down on the pantry dresser. As he cut into a new loaf of bread, he shook his head slowly from side to side, like an animal in pain, stopping in the midst of the operation to bend above the offending biscuit and examine it closely. He loosened the cockroach with the point of the bread knife; it fell to the plate, a dark spot on the white china. Under his breath he heaved a staccato sigh "Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah"

Captain Sheldon found himself unable to forget this trivial incident; he kept brooding over it all the evening. At breakfast next morning it came to his mind again, and followed him intermittently throughout the day—a day of petty mishaps and annoyances, one of those days when everything aboard the vessel seemed to be going wrong, when even the best efforts of officers and men to please him resulted in misfortune, and the simplest words rubbed him the wrong way. Captain Sheldon was nearing the end of a long and tedious passage, with nerves and temper badly frayed.

Coming below an hour after dinner, in hope to find a little peace, he met the heavy odour of opium smoke floating through the cabin. The door into the forward cabin had been left open. He strode out angrily; the steward's door was open, too. Glancing into the stateroom, he saw the old Chinaman stretched on the bed, staring with glassy eyes at the ceiling, the pipe slipping from his fingers. Thin wisps of opium smoke curled up from the bowl and drifted out into the cabin.

Captain Sheldon's patience snapped suddenly. By God, this was too much! First, bugs in the bread; and now ... the lazy old swine, lying there in an opium dream, too indolent even to close the door! The ship's discipline was going plumb

to hell. His authority was becoming a joke. A dirty steward! By God, he wouldn't stand it any longer.

"Steward! Steward! Wake up, there!"

"What, Cappen?"

By a violent effort, Wang pulled himself out of the delicious stupor and sat up on the edge of the bunk. The drug had not fully overcome him; in a long lifetime, he had never exceeded the moderate daily pipeful that would put him to sleep for only half an hour.

"Steward, I can't permit this any longer. You've left your door open, and stunk up the whole cabin with the damned stuff"

"I s'pose close him, Cappen. Maybe wind swing him open"

"You didn't close it! You don't finish anything, now-a-days. It's got to stop, I tell you. I can see what the trouble is. This devilish opium is getting the best of you. It's got to stop—and the best way to stop, is to begin now.... Give me all the opium you've got"

"Yes, sir, Cappen"

The import of the captain's words brought the old Chinaman to his senses with a rush. He got up unsteadily, went to his chest, and began fumbling in the lower corner. Soon he brought out a number of small square packages done up in Chinese paper.

"Cappen, what you do with him?"

Captain Sheldon snatched the packages from the steward's hand.

"I'm going to throw it all overboard! If you've got any more of the stuff hidden away, you're not to smoke it—do you understand? I won't have such a mess in my cabin"

"Cappen, no can do!"

Wang was panting; a shrill note of anguish came into his voice. He reached out a trembling hand toward the precious drug.

"Yes, you can, and you will. It's nothing but a nasty, degenerate habit. You're too old for such things. It's making you dirty and careless. Brace up, now—show that you're good for something. You used to be the best steward in the fleet. I'm only trying to help you out. If things were to go on like this much longer, I'd have to find a new steward in Hong Kong"

Captain Sheldon, struggling to regain control of himself after the outburst of temper, stamped off through the after cabin. Wang heard him go up the companion. He sat down again on the edge of the bunk, a crumpled heap, inert and silent, his eyes dulled by a fear beyond any he had yet known. For fifty years he had smoked daily that tiny pipeful of opium. With all that life had brought him, could he summon strength for this new and terrible ordeal?

II

Fire, like the rain, falls on the just and the unjust alike, and eats up a tall ship at sea as readily as it guts a splendid castle. They were half way across from Luzon to the China coast, only a few hundred miles from Hong Kong and the end of the passage, when the blaze was discovered in the fore hold, already well under way. Quickly it became unmanageable. Through a day and a night of frantic effort the whole ship's company fought the flames, retreating aft inch by inch while destruction followed them relentlessly under decks. In the gleam of a dawn striking across a smooth sea and lighting up the pale faces gathered on the top of the after house, it became apparent that the ship was doomed.

Daylight found them in the boats, standing off to watch the last lurid scene. The ship burned fiercely throughout the forenoon. At midday, under a blistering sun, her bows seemed suddenly to crumple and dissolve; surrounded by a cloud of steam, she settled forward with a loud hissing noise, and slowly vanished under the waters of the China Sea.

Captain Sheldon, sitting upright in the stern of the long-boat, watched the scene with set jaw and snapping eyes. It was his first disaster, the first time he had met destiny coming the other way. A fierce anger, like the fire he had just been fighting, ran in his blood. He was beside himself. It seemed inconceivable that there was no way to bring his ship back out of the deep; that the very means of authority had vanished, that he was powerless, that the event was sealed for all time. He wanted to strike out blindly, hit something, crush something.

Well he knew that if any blame attached to the matter, it rested on him alone. For some occult reason, as it now seemed, the mate a few days before had broached the subject of fire, in conversation at the supper table. Not that fire was to be expected; no one ever had heard of it with such a cargo. Why had the mate chosen that day, of all others, when the captain had lost his patience with old Wang, to talk about fire throughout the supper period, to follow him on deck with the subject in the evening? The talk had only aroused the perversity of his own opposition. The mate, waxing eloquent and imaginative, had at length succeeded in frightening himself; had wanted to take off the fore hatch in the dog watch, just to look into the hold. Had he done so then, the fire would probably have been discovered in season to overcome it. But Captain Sheldon, sarcastic and bristling with arbitrariness, had flatly commanded him to leave the fore hatch alone.

Well, no use in crying over spilt milk. The ship was gone.

"Give way!" he shouted across the water to the mate's boat "Keep along with me. We'll strike in for the coast, and follow it down"

All the afternoon they rowed silently in the broiling heat and mirror-like calm. The coast of China came in sight, a range of high blue-grey mountains far inland. Nearer at hand, a group of outlying islands appeared on the horizon. Captain Sheldon swung his course to the westward, heading directly into the blinding sun that by this time had sunk low in the western sky.

In the extreme bow of the longboat sat the old steward, gazing straight ahead with unseeing eyes. His head was uncovered; the sun beat down on him without effect. He made no movement, uttered no sound. Alone and helpless, he suffered the throes of the most desperate struggle that human consciousness affords—the struggle of the will against the call of a body habituated to opium.

In the latter part of the afternoon they sighted a big Chinese junk, close inshore against the islands. A light breeze had begun to ruffle the water. On the impulse of the moment, Captain Sheldon decided to board the junk and have himself carried to Hong Kong under sail. The idea caught him and suited his fancy; he couldn't bear to think of arriving in port in open boats. Instructions were shouted to the mate's boat, the head of the longboat was again swung around, and a course was laid to intercept the brown-sailed native craft under the lee of the land.

All this passed unnoticed by the silent figure in the bow, wandering blindly through a grim vale of endeavour. As time went on, however, Wang seemed to realize that a change had taken place in the plan of their progress. The sun no longer shone full in his face. He glanced up dully, caught a vague sight of the junk, now close aboard and standing, to his veiled eyes, like a dark blot on the clear rim of the horizon; then pulled himself hastily together and made a low inquiry of the man at the bow oar. The answer seemed to galvanize his tortured body into action. He began to scramble aft under the moving oars.

"Here, what's the trouble forward?" Captain Sheldon tried to make out the cause of the commotion.

"Wang wants to come aft, sir"

"What for? Shove him into the bottom of the boat"

"He says he must see you, sir"

"Oh, the devil ... Well, let him come. He needn't hold up the boat for that"

Many hands helped the old Chinaman aft.

Muttering rapidly to himself, he sank into a place beside the captain.

"What's that you say?" demanded Captain Sheldon "What are you trying to hatch up now?"

Wang made a vague beckoning gesture in the captain's face. Behind all that floated wildly through his mind, stood the fixed thought that he must not shame "Young Cappen" by openly imparting information.

"Are you sick or crazy?" demanded Captain Sheldon again, bending above

the maundering old man.

"Cappen, junk he no good!" whispered Wang feverishly "No can do, Cappen! Must go 'way, chop-chop. Night come soon. Maybe no see"

Captain Sheldon gave a loud laugh. He spoke for all to hear.

"What damned nonsense have you got into your head now?"

"No, sir, Cappen. Look-see!" Wang grasped the other's arm with frantic strength, pulling him down "You no savvy him, Cappen. Killee quick, no good! You no wanchee him. Go Hong Kong side, chop-chop. Night come, maybe can do. Cappen, I savvy plenty what for!"

"Oh, shut up, you raving old idiot!" cried Captain Sheldon, roughly.

At this inopportune moment the mate, ranging alongside in his boat, offered a suggestion. They were closing in with the junk now; a row of yellow faces peered over the side toward them, watching with narrow bright eyes every movement of the approaching boats.

"Captain Sheldon, I don't like the looks of that crowd" said the mate nervously "Hadn't we better sheer off, sir?"

"No, certainly not!" shouted the angry captain. "I suppose I'm still in charge here, even if the ship is gone. Do you think I haven't any judgment? By God, between a timid mate and a crazy steward.... Give way, boys, there's nothing to be afraid of!"

The breeze had by this time died away, the junk was scarcely moving. A moment later their oars rattled against the side. Captain Sheldon scrambled aboard. He gave a rapid glance along the low maindeck, but saw nothing to arouse his suspicion. A man, evidently the captain of the craft, was advancing toward him; the crew were crowding around to overhear the conversation. But all this was only natural. An ordinary trading junk, of course; heaven alone knew what all these native craft really were doing. After a moment's scrutiny, he dismissed from his mind any thought that may secretly have been aroused by Wang's warning and the mate's unfortunate remark.

"You losee ship—ha?" The captain of the junk accosted him in good pidgin English.

"Yes—she burned this morning. I want you to take me to Hong Kong"

Within half an hour the bargain had been struck, and they were comfortably established on the new deck. The breeze had freshened, the junk's head had been put about, the two ship's boats trailed astern in single file at the end of a long line. The *Retriever's* company had partaken of a Chinese supper; many of them were spending the last hour of daylight in examining the queer craft, passing remarks on her strange nautical points, while the native crew watched their movements with furtive gaze.

Captain Sheldon paced to and fro on the high poop deck, chewing the end

of a cigar and ruminating on the unaccountable turns of fortune. The adventure of boarding the junk had for a time broken the savage current of his thoughts; but now, with the affair settled and night closing in, the mood of anger and bitterness claimed him again with redoubled intensity.

The mate ranged up beside him with a friendly air. He felt the need of a reconciliation.

"You'll be interested to hear, Captain, that old Wang has found a pipeful of opium"

"The devil you say! I wondered where the old rascal had disappeared to. How do you know?"

"He's been hanging around the Chinese crew, sir, ever since we came aboard. I went through their quarters down below forward a while ago, and there he lay in one of their bunks, dead to the world, with the pipe across his chest"

"The useless old sot!" exclaimed Captain Sheldon "I had made up my mind to get rid of him this time, anyway. You know he has been in the family, so to speak. But I don't like the idea of his going off with his native gang. Combined with the opium business, it looks suspicious. You'd better keep an eye on him. He's got a grudge against me, you know, since I took away his stuff"

"I guess they'll all bear watching, sir"

"Oh, nonsense! There isn't the slightest cause for alarm. It's perfectly evident that this craft is a peaceful trader, and we could handle the whole gang of 'em if they began to make trouble. They won't, though, never fear; a Chinaman is too big a coward. This captain seems to be quite an intelligent fellow; I've just been having a yarn with him. He has given up his room to me; well, not much of a room, nothing but a bunk and a door, but such as it is, it's all he has. Funny quarters they have down below, like a labyrinth of passages, all leading nowhere.

The mate laughed. "Funny enough forward, too; a damned stinking hole, if you ask me, sir"

While they were talking on the poop, Wang appeared on deck forward, went to the weather rail and sniffed a deep breath of the land breeze. He had had an hour's opium sleep—an hour of heaven, an hour of life again. Now he could command his faculties. Blindness was no hindrance to work in the dark; was even an advantage, since for many months now he had been accustomed to feeling and groping his way. Fate had been good to him, at the last. Now he possessed the strength to do what he would have to do.

The familiar voices of the mate and the captain came to his ears, but he did not glance in their direction. The least move on his part to give information would have been his last. He had heard enough already to know that the death of the whole ship's company that night was being actively planned, for the sake of the boats and the mysterious tin box that Captain Sheldon carried.

III

In spite of physical exhaustion, it was nearly midnight before Captain Sheldon left the deck and crawled into the narrow den under the poop-deck that had been given up to him by the Chinese captain. He could not get to sleep for a long while. He was taking his loss very hard; that inflexible, proud disposition would almost have met death sooner than admit an error. At length, however, he fell into a light and uneasy slumber.

He was awakened some time later by a light touch on the arm—a touch that started him from sleep without alarming him into action. A voice whispered softly in his ear

"Cappen! Cappen! This b'long Wang. No makee speakee" A firm hand was laid over his mouth.

In the pitchy darkness of the close room, Captain Sheldon could see absolutely nothing. Listening intently, he heard stealthy movements outside the door. On deck there was utter silence. He became aware instinctively that the junk was no longer moving, that the wind had gone.

He lay perfectly still. The suddenness of the occasion had brought an unaccountable conflict of impulses and emotions. He felt that an alarming crisis was in the air. Along with this feeling came another, strange enough at such a time—a sense of confidence in the old steward. He had immediately recognized the voice in his ear. Why hadn't he jumped out of bed? Why wasn't he lying there in momentary expectation of a knife in the ribs—why didn't he throw himself aside to avoid it? He could not understand his own immobility; yet he remained quiet. Something in the old Chinaman's whisper held him in its command. Pride had succumbed to intrinsic authority.

The rapid whisper began again, panting and insistent.

"Cappen, you come now. Mus' come quick. I savvy how can do. Maybe got time. S'pose stay here, finishee chop-chop" The hand was removed from his mouth, as if conscious that discretion had sufficiently been imposed.

"What has happened, Wang?" whispered the agitated captain.

"Makee killee, all samee I know"

"Where's the mate? Where's the crew?"

"All go, Cappen" Again the hand came over his mouth "You come quick. Bym'by, no can do"

Captain Sheldon flung the steward's arm aside and sat up wildly. "Good God, let me go, Wang! I must go out…."

"Cappen, make no bobbery"

"Where's my revolver?" The captain was hunting distractedly through the bed.

"He go, too" The whisper took on a despairing tone. "Cappen, s'pose you gotee match?"

"Yes"

"Makee one light"

Captain Sheldon found the box and struck a match. The tiny illumination filled the narrow cabin. As the flame brightened, Wang rolled over on the floor, disclosing one hand held against his left breast, a hand holding a bloody wad of tunic against a hidden wound. A sop of blood on the floor marked the spot where he had been lying.

The match burned out. Again came the painful whisper.

"Maybe can do now. Bym'by, no can do"

"My God, Wang! You're wounded! How can we get out? I'll carry you"

"No, sir, Cappen. I savvy way. You feelee here, Cappen"

The steward was already fumbling with his free hand at a ringbolt in the floor. He guided the captain's arm to it. Captain Sheldon grasped the ringbolt, pulled up a trap-door that seemed to lead into the hold. Letting himself over the edge, his feet found a deck not far below. He stood upright in the opening, and lifted Wang bodily to the lower level. The old Chinaman struggled to be put down.

"Wang, keep still—let me carry you"

"No, sir, Cappen. Walkee-walkee, can do. You no savvy way"

Stooping and keeping an arm half around him, Captain Sheldon followed Wang through a shallow lazaret. It led forward into the open hold. They passed beneath a hatch, where Wang drew aside in the deeper shadow, listening. Not a sound came from overhead. Again they stole forward. The wounded man held on indomitably, bearing his pain in a silence that seemed almost supernatural, as if unknown to the other he had been rendered invulnerable by a magic spell. Beyond the hatch they entered a narrow passage-way, and came out suddenly into the junk's forecastle, the quarters of the Chinese crew. A ladder led to another open hatch in the deck above.

As they reached the foot of the ladder, a fearful yelling suddenly broke out toward the stern, a sound of savage anger. Naked feet pattered on the deck overhead going aft. Wang grasped the captain's arm.

"S'pose breakee in door, no findee. One minute have got! Boat stand off, waitee! Go quickee, Cappen, jump ovelboa'!"

Captain Sheldon heard him with a shock of incredulity. "The boats are standing off? The crew haven't been killed?"

"No, sir, Cappen. All hand savee! You go now"

He felt the old man sag in his arms.

"Wang, I can't leave you here!"

"Why for, Cappen? Wang no good. Quickee! Makee jump!"

The voice broke; the frail body crumpled and slipped to the floor.

Gathering all his strength, Captain Sheldon slung the old steward's unconscious form over his shoulder and swarmed up the ladder. As he gained the deck, a tall figure dashed between him and the rail; other figures were racing through the waist of the junk. An angry chatter broke out at the foot of the ladder up which he had just come.

Holding Wang to one side, he struck out heavily at the man who blocked his path, felling him to the deck. Darkness and surprise saved the day for him; their quarry had appeared like a whirlwind in their very midst. The next instant Captain Sheldon had gained the rail, and jumped clear of the junk's side. The two bodies made a loud splash that echoed through the calmness of the night. As he came to the surface, desperately striking away from the junk and trying to keep Wang's head above water, he heard a shout a little distance off in the darkness, and the rattle of oars as the boats sprang into action.

IV

The longboat was the first to reach him. They pulled him in with his burden still in his arms. The mate, appearing beside them in the other boat, gave vent to his anxiety.

"Good God, Captain Sheldon, I thought you were done for! Why didn't you come, sir? Wang gave me your orders; we hauled up the boats very quietly as you said, and got into them, while he kept the Chinamen busy forward with talk. He said you would come, sir; but we were discovered, and I had to sheer off. I was afraid they'd sink the boats, sir, before we could do anything. I didn't know what weapons they had. I was just planning an attack, sir. Then I thought I saw them stab old Wang...."

"I've got Wang" said Captain Sheldon solemnly "They did stab him. Those weren't my orders—they were his. And he's the only one to pay the price!" The young captain was beginning to face a harder lesson than the mere loss of a vessel.

"I don't understand, sir. Wasn't it the right thing to do?" The mate was completely puzzled by this new development.

"Yes, yes, it was the right thing to do!" cried Captain Sheldon impatiently

"He was right, and I was wrong. Now leave me alone"

He bent above the shrunken form of the old steward. Wang's eyelids fluttered; he was slowly regaining consciousness.

"Wang, why didn't you come and tell me, in time to save all this?"

The Chinaman's eyes regarded him with a stare of mingled surprise and affection, a stare that somehow suggested a wise and quiet amusement.

"I tellee you, Cappen. You no savvy. S'pose no savvy, no can do. Mus' wait, makee savvy."

It was a terrible condemnation. Captain Sheldon ground his teeth at the bitter truth of it. His own obstinacy, his own evil! Nothing that Wang could have said, before the thing had happened, would possibly have changed his mind. He had committed himself to error. The old servant had been forced to save them single-handed, to retrieve his master's failure with his own life.

Wang was muttering, as he neared the end. He was about to join "Old Cappen" With a good report and a clean record. No one could have known the depth of the calm that had come to that aged heart. Even the awful pain of the wound had stopped, under the shock of the cool water. He seemed to be drifting off into an eternal opium dream.

"What is it, Wang? Can I do anything for you?"

"No, sir, Cappen. Bym'by, finishee"

He lay quiet for a moment, then plucked at the other's sleeve.

"Old Cappen say, boy step high. Look out! Maybe more-better stop, look-see"

Captain Sheldon buried his face in his hand. Had the words come with lesser force, they would have infuriated him; had the advice been given as advice, it would have defeated its own ends. But now it came with the authority of death, sealed with the final service it came with the meaning of life, and could not be denied.

RESCUE AT SEA

RESCUE AT SEA

When an Arctic blizzard strikes the Atlantic Coast without warning, the coal laden schooner that puts to sea trusting in an uncertain Providence catches it off to the northward of Cape Cod or down along the Jersey shore; and you read in your morning paper how some steamer reached her in the nick of time, and rescued her frozen crew as she was on the point of going down.

But this was not always the way of it; a mechanical age has completely forgotten the day when steam was an innovation on the sea, when sailing ships were the accepted mode of travel and transportation, and when the details of rescue breathed a more romantic story. It was not so many years ago that steamers themselves were heavily rigged, relying to a large extent on their canvas when the wind was favourable. Then the lanes of the sea were crowded with handsome square-rigged sailing vessels; and your morning paper reported more often how sail had lent a hand to steam, than steam to sail.

But let me tell it in the captain's own words.

* * * * *

I was coming home that time from Liverpool to New York in the ship *Pactolus*, a moderate clipper of the early seventies. A regular run, it was; voyage after voyage I'd been the rounds from New York with general cargo to San Francisco, from San Francisco with wheat to Liverpool, thence home in ballast, less than a year for the complete circuit. A famous course, the course that had called into being the extreme clipper ship, and the one on which her best and most astonishing records had been made.

So we were flying light, in a great hurry to swing across the Western Ocean; for my owners had cabled that the cargo was ready and the ship badly needed. A spell of dirty weather had followed us ever since leaving Liverpool; it had kept me on deck night and day, but I wasn't complaining so long as the wind hung on our tail. At length, however, the easterly spell seemed to have blown itself out, and a change of weather was imminent. Nightfall of the day that brought us abreast of the Banks of Newfoundland closed in with threatening signs. I kept the deck till midnight, saw the wind shift into the sout'ard, but at last decided that we weren't to catch a blow that night. It was early autumn, a season when storms in the Atlantic aren't always dependable. Soon after the watch was changed I went below, leaving word to be called in case things took a turn.

At four o'clock in the morning, when they changed the watch again, the mate stepped below and rapped at the cabin door. I came out of my bunk all-standing, thinking at once of a change of weather and trying to feel it in the angle of the deck.

"What's up, Mr Ridley?" I called "Is it breezing on from the southeast?"

"No, sir" he answered through the door "But there's a strange light on the weather bow, sir, a long way off. I wish you'd come up and have a look at it. I think it must be a ship afire"

I dressed immediately, and went on deck. Off about three points on the weather bow a big glow lit up the heavens, like an island burning somewhere below the horizon. It was impossible to estimate the distance it was away; but only one thing could cause it, there on the broad Atlantic with no land nearer than five hundred miles. That thing was fire. For it distinctly wasn't a natural phenomenon; all those hard violet rays that characterize electrical disturbances were lacking, and in their place were the warm tones of smoke and flame, reflected brightly in the low-hanging sky.

I hauled the ship up as close to the wind as possible, trimmed the yards carefully, and found that I could just fetch the light of the conflagration by jamming her hard. Before this, we had been running free, with the wind a couple of points abaft the beam. Almost as soon as we brought her to the wind, it began to breeze on in little gusts; the delayed southeaster, I realized, was at last rapping at the door. The skysails were already furled, and under ordinary conditions I should now have taken in the royals; but I kept them set and let her go. She was a smart vessel on the wind; the more sail she carried, up to a certain point, the better she liked it and the higher she would point. She heeled a little harder as she felt the squalls, gave a lift and a lunge, then found her pace and settled to it, heading directly for the lurid glow in the western, sky.

Within an hour we were able to make out the tops of flame above the horizon, and saw that there must be a big vessel afire. The flames flickered, appearing and vanishing behind the rim of the ocean, as if the world had caught ablaze and was trying to touch off the sky. A wild sight, almost supernatural; it sent a chill through our hearts, and the whole ship's company were terribly excited. I thought of trying to set the skysails, but my better judgment prevailed. It wouldn't do to carry anything aloft at such a time. In the freshening breeze the *Pactolus* had all the canvas she wanted, and was making an excellent run of it, as if she realized that time might be a matter of life and death.

The burning ship, when the mate first called me, must have been about thirty-five miles away. At half past six we had her well in view. She looked like an enormous torch dropped on a black and angry ocean; solid flames mounted hundreds of feet in air, illuminating a wide arc of the western horizon. Long before we reached her, the fire lighted our own decks with a wild glare and painted our sails a hideous red.

At seven o'clock, just as dawn was beginning to break, we passed a hundred yards to windward of her, took up a favourable position a short distance beyond, and swung our main yard. She was a large three-masted bark-rigged steamer, a

passenger vessel, I saw with increasing alarm. Her main and mizzen masts had already been burned away, the middle section of her hull was red-hot like a stove, and the sheet of solid flame that we'd been watching for hours rose above her with a steady appalling roar, as if a great bellows were blowing under her keel.

It had been apparent to us from the first that nobody could be left aboard—nobody left alive, that is. I felt certain, however, that if they had managed to get away in the boats, they'd be clinging to the vicinity of the disaster, in the knowledge that she would attract everything afloat through a radius of fifty miles or more. Almost immediately, this notion was confirmed; we sighted a bright light on the water just astern of the steamer, then another, and in a few minutes three flare-ups were burning in as many boats and as many directions. Nothing for us to do but keep our mainyard aback and let them row to us. Thus fifteen or twenty minutes passed, while I was on tenterhooks over the ship's situation.

At length, after a desperate struggle, they dragged one by one under our lee. The mate had charge of getting the people aboard. Men in the main channels passed a bow and stern line to each boat, others fended them off with boat-hooks, still others helped the castaways over the rail. It was a lucky chance that we reached them when we did; the three boats were badly overloaded, half full of water, the wind by this time was breezing on sharply, and the sea making up minute by minute. They wouldn't have been able to keep themselves afloat another hour.

The captain's boat was the first to come alongside. I saw them pass up a woman with a year-old baby, then an invalid man. Next came another woman, who proved to be the stewardess of the steamer; she was carrying a heavy parcel done up in a tablecloth, that rattled and jangled like a bag of doubloons. In an overloaded boat, in half a gale of wind, she had salvaged the ship's tableware! The rest of the crowd were indiscriminate; except for the women, of whom there weren't many, I couldn't tell passengers from crew. As I stood watching at the break of the poop, a man with a long beard and a blanket wrapped around him came up to me. He seemed half dazed; he was carrying in his hand a small hatchet, the blade stained with blood.

"What the devil are you doing with that thing?" I demanded.

"I killed the ox, sir" he answered wildly—it came over me in a flash that he must be the cook. "I couldn't leave him there to burn"

The captain was the last man from that boat to come over the side. I shook his hand, but had no time just then for conversation; a fact that he recognized at a glance, drawing a little way aft along the weather alley and leaving me alone. For everything had to be done at once, you know; these people saved, and my own ship looked after. We were in a ticklish position. With main yard aback, and every squall heavier than the last, we might easily get stern-way on and that

would never do. I felt pretty confident of my gear aloft, but if anything carried away to hinder the handling of the sails, we should find ourselves in a pretty kettle of fish. Above all, I kept a sharp eye on the relative position of the burning steamer. Aback as we were, with so much canvas spread, we must, I thought, be drifting steadily down toward her; and it would be the end of us to run afoul of that inferno, or even to fall to leeward of her. Watching closely, I soon made out that we held our distance from the craft, or rather, that she held her distance from us; incredible as it seemed, she was drifting as fast as we were. I turned to her captain, calling his attention to this mystery.

"Yes, I noticed it" said he "It seems to me that the sheet of flame must in some way be acting like an enormous sail. I can think of no other explanation"

Neither could I—and I believe that he was right. She had been barque-rigged, as I said, and the foremast with its heavy yards, still standing, kept her head three or four points off the wind, so that she lay in the position of running free; her sides, too, were high, caught a lot of wind, and gave her headway. But the sheet of flame must have helped her progress. For here we were with a ship flying light, and sufficient canvas spread to drive us to leeward at a rate of four or five knots an hour, even with the main yard holding her dead.

Too much canvas, in fact; the wind had begun to come with a new weight and no time afforded for proper seamanship. No time. We had taken in the royals before we reached the steamer; had clewed them up, but been obliged to leave them hanging, we'd ranged past her so rapidly. As we backed the main yard, we had let all three of the topgallant yards run down, and hauled down the flying jib. All these light sails were threshing and pounding aloft, while the men who should have furled them were busy saving life in the lee channels; the jib was slatting itself to pieces on the end of the jibboom. At that very moment, under ordinary conditions, we should have been housed down under reefed upper topsails.

The captain of the steamer had been waiting for me to find a free moment. Now he pulled up beside me.

"My name is Potter, Captain Clark" said he "I just heard your mate call you by name. It's needless to say anything, sir, about what you are doing for us"

"Yes" I answered "save that for the coffee. We haven't got through the soup yet"

He gave a short laugh. "Speaking of grub, Captain, how about fresh water? We haven't much in the boats, and we're adding a good many to your ship's company"

"I've water enough to last a hundred men for a month" I told him "Water enough for washing, and all purposes" The iron tank below the main-deck, five thousand gallons, had just been filled in Liverpool.

He looked at me a little incredulously. "Thank God!" said he "I've been wor-

rying about that ever since I came aboard. Your American ships go well provided for"

The third boat had then come alongside. "Is this your whole outfit, Captain Potter?" I asked.

"Good God, no!" he cried "There's another boat somewhere—if it hasn't gone down"

"We sighted only three. But we'll find it for you, all in due time" I reassured him.

"It's the second mate's boat" said he "The poor fellow was half blind from fighting the fire, but he insisted that he could take charge of a boat. He couldn't have lost her—he was no more heavily loaded than we were. I expect he's been left somewhere to windward, Captain; we have drifted away from him. You'd hardly believe it, but we had tough work, rowing our strongest, to keep up with the drift of the vessel. My orders were to keep her in company as long as she burned"

"Well, if your second mate is to windward, we may have difficulty in reaching him" I pointed out "You see how it is, sir; this will be a living gale inside of an hour. But we will do everything possible. Wait till it grows a little lighter. In the meantime, what about these boats of yours?"

"I'm done with them, Captain" he answered "You can do what you like"

There were two big steel lifeboats, and a smaller Whitehall boat. "I'll swing the lifeboats aboard, then, and let the other go" said I "We may have a fire of our own before we reach New York; and my boats would barely accommodate my own ship's company. Mr. Ridley, rig a preventor lift on the lee main yard-arm, and hoist those two big boats aboard"

My mate, I'm sorry to say, had lost his head in the excitement and confusion. A fine old man, an excellent seaman, came from down Deer Island way; but he had outlived his usefulness, as many of us do. He was running fore and aft the ship, accomplishing nothing, and chiefly whining about his sails being slat to pieces.

Just as I gave the order to hoist in the boats, the third group of castaways, in charge of the steamer's boatswain, were coming over the rail. These men were mostly from the forecastle; for she had been heavily sparred, crossed a couple of royal yards, and carried fourteen men before the mast to handle her sails. The boatswain was an impudent little Londoner, every inch a sailor, and one of your old-fashioned chanty-men. He caught my eye from the maindeck, and whipped out his whistle.

"Shall I tyke the order, Captain?" he roared through the din.

"Go ahead!" I told him, waving my hand. Old Ridley hadn't heard me, anyway.

"Aloft there, men!" cried the boatswain with a swagger, giving a long blow on his whistle "Here's a bloomin' deck under yer feet again, an' Di-vy Jones'll wyt

a while longer. D'ye hear the Old Man's orders? Preventor lift on the lee main yard-arm, there, and hoist in the bloomin' boats. Lively now, lend a hand, my lads, an' show 'em what ye knows"

They sprang up the ratlines like monkeys; heaven knows, a tarry rope must have felt good in their hands again! In a jiffy they had rigged the lift, and got a sling under the first boat. A few moments later, as the boat rose slowly across the rail, I heard the little Cockney's voice aloft, raised in a hauling chanty:

"Oh, Bony was a war-ri-or,
A-*way*! Ay-*yah!*
A war-ri-or, a ter-ri-or,
Jean Fran-swar!"

His men came in loudly on the chorus; their voices gave me a turn, to think of the vicissitudes of fortune. For they had been snatched from certain death, and they knew it already. As it happened, that tall fire in mid-ocean was not reported by anyone else; we were the only ship in all those waters to sight and come up with it. And in less than an hour after we had taken the last man aboard, we were stripped to three lower topsails, hove-to in a howling gale.

Full daylight had come while they were hoisting in the boats. We still lay with the main yard aback, to windward of the burning steamer; forty minutes, perhaps, had passed since we'd come into the wind. In a few minutes more we should be ready to get under way—and no sign yet of the fourth boat with her load of frightened humanity.

I caught a young scamp running by, a boy from home that I'd had for the round voyage. "Here, you young rascal, jump aloft and see if you can pick up another boat anywhere" said I "She's likely to be to windward. Hustle, now! You've been nothing but trouble all the voyage; now earn your salt" I knew that he had the sharpest pair of eyes aboard.

He was up the mainmast in a flash, slipped past the slatting topgallant-sail, and reached the sky-sail yard. In a few minutes he sang out

"I see a boat to leeward, sir!"

"Where away?"

"Just abeam, beyond the steamer"

I feared that his imagination had run away with him, so sent the second mate into the mizzen cross-trees with a pair of binoculars. He reported a boat sure enough to leeward—a boat with a tiny sail set.

"That accounts for it!" exclaimed Captain Potter "I forgot that leg-o'-mutton sail in the second mate's boat. But why has he used it, to run away from the steamer, when I ordered him to stand by her?"

"I'm afraid it means that he is hard pressed" I answered "He's had to run for it, in order to keep afloat. We must fill away at once. I hope we can manage to reach him in time"

While we were swinging the main yard, Captain Potter stood on the after house, alone beside the mizzen mast, watching his burning vessel. She was a splendid steamer, only a few years old. He watched her soberly. I left him to himself. After we had got the *Pactolus* off before the wind, with things around decks a little under control, he said good-bye to his command, as it were, turned aft, and took his place beside me on the quarterdeck.

"Can you make out the boat yet from the deck?"

"She's dead ahead. They have seen her from the forecastle"

We looked aloft. Yards were groaning, gear was cracking; under full upper-topsails the ship swept down the wind like a racehorse, fairly leaping through the water. She must have been a splendid sight to those poor fellows in the second mate's boat, waiting for her at the door of death.

"You have a fine ship, sir" said Captain Potter. "I've never seen a ship handled so smartly, in such a breeze and under so much sail. You must avail yourself of any help that my crew can give you. My officers are thorough seamen, brought up under sail"

"Thank you, sir—I see that they are" I answered "But after we have things straightened around once more, I think we won't need any assistance" My pride was up, you know, now that the affair was beginning to turn out so well. She was a British steamer, and these officers, fine young Englishmen of the best breed, ambitious and well-trained in the school of sailing ships, were watching me and my vessel with critical eyes. I'd show them what it meant to be picked up by a Yankee clipper.

"I make this passage every year, Captain" I went on "and always carry extra men for it. After leaving my wheat in Liverpool, I have to get back to New York in the quickest possible time, to load again for California. It's much like your steamer with her schedule. With extra men I'm able to carry on sail a little longer, handle her in ordinary weather with one watch, and save the wear and tear on the crew. The wear and tear comes mostly on me. I'll have your crew to fall back on now, and will be able to hold my sail still longer. A sort of reserve force, you know, ready to jump in an emergency"

He glanced over the stern-rail, where the steamer lay blazing in our wake. In falling off we had swung a wide circle around her, to escape the path of the sparks as they whirled down the wind; and now had left her a couple of miles astern.

"She burns well, Captain" I observed "That's the hottest fire I ever felt, or ever wanted to feel"

He gave a bitter laugh. "They loaded her especially for it" said he "Cotton goods, and butter, and bacon, and hams" As if not caring to look at her any longer, he turned forward, mounted the steps to the top of the house, and took up his old position by the mizzen mast.

In twenty minutes after filling away, we had reached the second mate's boat. A look through the binoculars showed me that things were indeed in a bad way with them; there wasn't a moment to lose. The boat seemed momentarily on the point of filling, while half a dozen men along her sides baled frantically with buckets and other utensils. A man in the stern sheets was waving wildly at us, as if to communicate some information. I had a notion what it was; they were trying to tell us that they wouldn't be able to bring the boat into the wind. I saw that plainly. Captain Potter, coming hurriedly to the after end of the house, evidently saw it, too.

"How will you pick them up, Captain?" he asked nervously.

"I think we can do it without difficulty" I answered, as if such measures were a matter of course. In point of fact, I had never executed the manoeuvre that seemed necessary in this pass, and had never heard of its being tried by anyone else. As we approached the boat, I hauled the ship well out on their starboard quarter, passed them several hundred yards to port and left them a quarter of a mile astern; then swung the ship across their course, came up to leeward of them with a shock and a crash, backed the main yard, lost headway, and stopped in exactly the right position for them to fetch our stern as they ran before the wind. In other words, I cut a half circle around them and placed myself athwart their hawse, in the way of an old-fashioned naval manoeuvre.

We looked down on them from the quarter-deck as they raced toward us. Several men seemed disabled, water was washing nearly up to her thwarts, but a few oars were poised in readiness, showing intelligence and discipline somewhere aboard. In a moment she was on the point of our weather quarter, sweeping past our stern.

"Round the stern!" shouted Captain Potter and I together "Get under the lee, and jump for the main channels!"

But they had already seized their last and only opportunity. A smooth patch on the water favoured them; they made the turn nicely, let go their sail, and succeeded in paddling up under our quarter.

"Jump while it's smooth!" I cried "Let the boat go"

My crew had by this time become expert channelsmen. One of them caught the painter, others used their boathooks; and the last load of castaways from the steamer tumbled over the side, more dead than alive, but alive enough to know that they'd been saved. The painter was cast off, the boat drifted clear of the quarter, filled, overturned, and was whirled away on the top of a breaking sea.

Safely on our decks, watching this symbol of elemental destruction, stood every soul of the steamer's company.

"I really must congratulate you again!" said Captain Potter heartily "That was a feat of seamanship, sir. You seem to be able to put your ship through the eye of a needle"

"She handles nicely, doesn't she?" I agreed. As a matter of fact, I felt like congratulating myself; I won't deny that I had a feeling of pride, as well as a prayer of thankfulness for our universal good luck. Things had gone without a hitch, at a time when a hitch might easily have called for payment in human life.

So here we were, with sixty people landed suddenly on our decks; with whole topsails set, and a gale of wind turned loose upon us. I'd been obliged to abandon the upper sails, while we were saving the first three boatloads; they had slat themselves to shreds before we could find time to furl them. The chief thing now was to get the upper topsails in. I made up my mind that we would shorten sail with our own crew. The crowd from the steamer were completely fagged out; they had been fighting fire and the Atlantic for twenty-four hours. I told them to go below, in the after cabin or the forward house, anywhere, have a smoke, and rest wherever they could find a chance to lie down; and instructed my steward to pass round a supply of dry tobacco.

When they had faded away and the decks were cleared for action, Captain Potter approached me again. "I hardly dare ask about provisions" he began "I'm sorry to tell you that we brought very little. The fire cleaned out our galley and store-rooms first of all, and we were barely able to save a meal or two of biscuits and canned grub"

I thought a minute, making a rough estimate. "We can furnish provisions to go with the water, Captain" I told him.

"What!—without allowance?" he cried.

"Without allowance" said I "I never liked the idea of putting people on an allowance; it's too much like starving yourself by degrees. I can guarantee you provisions to last us for a month or six weeks, three good meals a day; and we can't in common fortune be out that long. The best of provisions, I think you'll find"

"How does it happen, sir?" he demanded.

"It doesn't happen. We're always prepared for just such an emergency. More than once I've met a ship short of provisions, and furnished her with a boatload or two. You can't anticipate what is liable to happen; but a lazaret full of beef and flour and potatoes fills in almost anywhere"

He shook his head in amazement. "I've often heard it said that American ships were remarkably well-found" he observed "But I shouldn't have believed a yarn like this from my best friend. Let's see, we've brought you three times your

ordinary ship's company; and you have provisions and water for all hands to last longer than twice your usual run to New York. Are you positive, sir?"

"Positive. Give yourself no further worry on that score"

"Back there in the boats" said Captain Potter "I was thinking that, if God was good to us, we might be picked up by some Slavonian bark, with only macaroni enough aboard to take him to the Banks of Newfoundland, where he'd depend on catching a few codfish, and water or not according as it rained. Then it would have been a case of Halifax or St. Johns, or else a transfer in open boats to another vessel, with more danger to my passengers and crew. This, Captain, seems like a pleasant dream"

There was no necessity for telling him how it really did happen. In the line for which I was sailing, a captain had the fitting out of his own vessel, and was given practically a free hand. I'd found that there were many things that I could buy cheaper and better in Liverpool; and I always laid in a supply of these for the round trip. Things like hams, and bacon, and tobacco; yes, tobacco, the best American plug at a shilling a pound, the same article that I would have had to pay fifty cents for in New York. At Liverpool, too, we could get the finest French and Irish potatoes; though they wouldn't keep for the round trip, I used to lay in enough to last me to New York and down to the Line on the outward passage. We had a ton and a half of potatoes on board that trip, when we sailed from Liverpool; we reached New York with half a ton of them left, so you can judge how short of provisions we were. Then there were certain things, especially flour, and canned fruits, vegetables and preserves of all kinds, which I could buy cheapest and best in San Francisco; I'd supplied the ship there with these articles, for the round trip, and a good half of the stock still remained. Butter—we had barrels of it. In fact, we could actually have fed all hands of them for two or three months without allowance; but I didn't want to spoil the effect by overdoing it. I let them continue to think that this was the accepted fashion on board of an American ship crossing the Western Ocean.

That afternoon, when the *Pactolus* was at last shortened down, the empty bolt-ropes unbent from the upper yards, and the decks cleared for heavy weather, the question of accommodations had to be disposed of. We started with the after cabin; the woman with her baby had one spare stateroom, the invalid man another. To Captain Potter I assigned a third spare stateroom, so that he could be by himself. My own room, with double bunk, sofa, and mattresses on the floor, I gave up to the rest of the women passengers; the stewardess slept on the sofa in the after cabin, and generally looked after the ladies' quarters.

This accounted for all the spare staterooms we had. For myself, I took the upper bunk in the mate's room, at the same time moving the second mate to this room, where he and the mate, having alternate watches, could share the

same bunk. This left the second mate's room free for the accommodation of the steamer's three deck officers, with two single bunks and a knock-down of pillows and blankets on the floor. In the steward's room also there were two berths; my steward kept the lower, the first steward of the steamer had the upper, and her second steward another knock-down on the floor.

In the forward house there were the galley, carpenter's shop, and sail room, all narrow rooms running from side to side of the house, each with two doors and two windows; forward of the sail room were the two forecastles, separated from each other by a fore-and-aft partition in the middle of the house, and opening forward on either side of the fore hatch. I moved all of my crew into one forecastle, since my only watch would be sleeping at a time; and put the steamer's crew into the vacated one, where bunks and bed clothes were ready for them to use. The engine room crowd were assigned to the carpenter's shop; the rest of the men-folk, a miscellaneous lot, first, second, and third class passengers all together, were given the sail room.

We had on board quantities of second-hand burlap and old sails, rolls and rolls of them, to be put down under the cargo of wheat, enough to line the whole inside of the ship when she was loaded; these were rolled up in the 'tween-decks after we discharged at Liverpool, to be overhauled and repaired on the passage across to New York, before being stowed away for use again in San Francisco. They were just what we needed for beds and coverings. In the two narrow rooms in the forward house, spread plenty thick on the floors, they made the finest possible knock-downs; although they were packed in pretty tight, the men couldn't have been more comfortable in their own berths.

Captain Potter wanted me to put them below the hatches. We were ballasted with salt in the lower hold, but the 'tween-decks were clean and empty; she was in splendid trim for sailing, dry as a bone in heavy weather. Undoubtedly, the 'tween-decks would have made a comfortable place for the men, with plenty of room all around. But my objection was a perfectly practical one. Every one of these men had saved his pipe; in many cases it seemed to be about all that he had saved. Pipes had been going in every mouth since they'd come aboard. And the sight of that burning steamer was seared into my eyes. It gave me the shivers merely to think of sending all those pipes to sit on a bed of sail-cloth below the hatches. Some kind of a fire was only to be expected; but a fire in the forward house would be the lesser of two evils.

With all my care, I made a serious mistake in these arrangements; a mistake due to my ignorance of steamship etiquette. I assigned the chief engineer to a place forward with the engine-room crowd, and paid him no further attention. The status of engineers wasn't in my category; I thought of them, when I thought of them at all, as belonging to some indefinite lower region, and lumped them all

together. But I was careful to make the proper distinction with the deck officers, for this was a matter within my own province.

Captain Potter gave me a broad hint that afternoon. "My chief engineer is a fine man, sir" he said "There has never been friction between us. He is highly thought of by the office"

I received the news as something in the way of conversation; wasn't much interested just then in the affairs of his vessel. What did I know of steamers? I'd been brought up under sail; and a steamer to me was nothing but a new-fangled usurper of the ocean, a thing to be sneered at, and to be outsailed when possible. It wasn't till some years afterwards, I remember, that I learned by accident that the chief engineer of a steamer was next in position to her master, above all of the deck officers. The knowledge was a shock to me; I recalled Captain Potter's remark, realized what I'd done, and saw how nice they had been about it. Even to-day, it annoys me to think of the mistake, and of the comment it must have caused.

We lived like kings; I gave free access to the provisions, fore and aft. The first steward of the steamer said "I'll wait at table" Our forward cabin table, hauled out to its full length, would seat fourteen people; he had to set it up three times for each meal, for all the passengers ate aft. The second steward said "I'll wash dishes" So he stood all day in the pantry, digging away at an endless job; for of course there weren't dishes enough to go around three whacks. The cook joined my cook and steward in the galley forward; among them they kept us fed. Made up a barrel of flour into bread every day, for one item. By chance, I overheard the steamer's first officer say one evening after supper, that her fare at its best hadn't equalled ours.

They were frank in admiration of the ship; of her equipment, her sailing qualities, her cleverness, dryness, and general seaworthiness; I could see that they were a little envious, too, of the way we handled her. We had a crew of Liverpool toughs, hard men, but experienced sailors, bred to American ships and their ways. They had caught the spirit of the game, filled the steamer's crew full of tall yarns in the dog-watch, and performed feats of seamanship for them on deck whenever the opportunity offered. Once the excitement of that first day was over, old Ridley's superb knowledge of his position emerged again. My second officer was one of your tall, fiery down-east youths, twenty-one years old, smart as a steel trap and able as a whirlwind.

We put the *Pactolus* through her paces, I can assure you; carried sail till all was blue. Luck sent us strong and favourable winds. In the dead of night I would often see the steamer's officers, dressed and wandering around the decks, or gathered in a group and holding low conversation; the ship would be scuppers under, the deck at a dangerous angle, masts and yards buckling and groaning, a spread of

motionless canvas rising aloft as hard as a board; the whole hull humming like a top, as she raced through the water at a fourteen-knot clip. It made them nervous; they wanted to give me their advice, but being young and proud, they wouldn't do it. I suppose they called me a reckless Yankee. But I knew my ship and trusted in my gear, knew exactly what I could do with them; and didn't carry away so much as a rope-yarn throughout the passage.

Only once did I have to call on our visitors for help. Closing in with Nantucket, we had run full-tilt into another southerly wind. It wasn't more than half a gale, and I had kept her running under a heavy press of canvas. After twelve hours had gone by, I knew that soon the wind would jump into the westward in a flurry, as all southeasters do in the end. Feeling secure, with extra men to draw on in case I got caught aback, I held my sail and course till the last gun was fired. We were running with the wind on the port beam, under three whole topsails, whole mainsail and foresail, spanker, mizzen, main and foretopmast staysails, and inner jib.

And before I knew it, I had really got caught. The wind jumped without warning, jumped quick and hard; one minute it was our old half-gale from the southward, the next minute it was a howling westerly squall. Before we could possibly pay off to the northward, the ship was flat aback. Then it was "All hands on deck to shorten sail!" with a vengeance, the vessel lying down to port, the masts cracking, the shrouds slackening with an ominous sag, and things in general looking badly for a while. The officers of the steamer ran on deck feather white, feeling the ship go over to windward; her first mate ranged up close beside me, and kept glancing backward and forward from my face to the masts, as if he expected them to go over the side any minute and wanted to watch me when they fell.

As soon as I'd seen that we were caught aback, I had let the three upper topsails come down with a run. My crew were aloft now on fore, main and mizzen, furling these sails, which I couldn't afford to lose. Neither could I afford to lose the mainsail or break the main yard; but at that moment there were no men to spare from the topsails, where the second mate was working like a demon; while old Ridley had all that he could do on deck, letting go gear and attending to the three topsail yards. With every fresh puff of westerly wind, I saw the main yard bending like a bow; it was a big spar, over ninety feet long. The mainsail was a new piece of canvas, and probably would hold; but the tack or the weather brace might carry away under the unequal strain, and then the yard was gone.

"You can blow your whistle, sir" I said to the young officer who had been watching me so closely—they all carried whistles in their pockets, to call their men with. "Take charge of that mainsail, if you please, and get it off her as quickly as you can"

He needed no second invitation; was off in a flash, blowing a loud toot as

he ran forward. I heard the call answered by another whistle in the waist; that little Cockney boatswain had been getting anxious, too. Out came the steamer's crew with a rush from their side of the forward house, where they'd fallen into the habit of loafing regardless of what went on outside. Clew-garnets and buntlines were manned with seamanlike precision, the tack was started, the sheet was eased away, and in a remarkably short time they had smothered the big sail and hauled it up to the yard.

But they didn't intend to leave the job half finished. "Aloft, boys, and out on the yard!" cried the mate. A moment later he sprang up the ratlines himself, to superintend the job; the little Cockney took the weather yardarm, piping a song as he perched above the water; they furled the sail smartly, reaching the deck along with our own men from the topsail yard.

Captain Potter, who had come on deck in the interval, was watching his men with manifest pride. I was glad that it happened so, and took especial pains to compliment the chief officer before all hands. He blushed like a school girl, now that the emergency was over. The little Cockney, however, couldn't resist a stroke of impudence.

"We thanks ye, Captain" he sang out loudly "That's the w'y we does it aboard of a bloomin' lime-juicer"

The sally brought a roar from the whole main-deck, in which I'd have been a stick if I hadn't joined.

"What do you do with such saucy rascals?" I called to Captain Potter "Shall I keel-haul him, or serve him an extra pint of grog?"

"Myke it a pint o' grog all around, Ol' Bo-ri-i" giggled the boatswain, dodging around the mast.

"I would if I could, my men" I laughed "But as you know, we have no grog or lime-juice in a Yankee ship. Beef and biscuit, work and wages, is what we sail on. You need no grog, if that's a sample of the way you feel" And I pointed aloft to the neatly furled mainsail.

With stern way on, we had by this time hauled out to port, braced the yards sharp up, and caught the wind in the foresail and three lower topsails. Our visitors perhaps had saved us from a serious accident; at any rate, they'd demonstrated their ability. It gave them something to brag about on their own account; while the effect on my crew was only to intensify the spirit of rivalry. In fact, the incident brought a great improvement to the tone of the ship; for I had noticed during the last couple of days a growing animosity between the steamer's forecastle and ours, due to the forced inactivity of the former.

On the following day the westerly breeze blew itself out; in the early afternoon a steamer overtook us, bound in for New York, passing about four miles to windward. We were then off to the southward of Nantucket, having come about

on the starboard tack during the night. I set a string of signals "Come closer. Have important news to communicate" The steamer made them out, changed her course, and ran down within hailing distance. She was a German vessel, one of the first oil-tankers to cross the Atlantic, they told me in New York; her name was the *Energie*. Her captain couldn't speak English fluently; but he had picked up a New York pilot somewhere on the Banks, a man who'd been carried to sea by another vessel in a storm. He was the fellow who talked to me from the bridge, although I didn't know it at the time.

"Steamer ahoy!" I hailed; "The British steamer *Santiago* has burned at sea. I have on board her entire ship's company, and am taking them to New York. No one was lost, either passengers or crew. Please report us all well"

They held a consultation over this news on the bridge of the *Energie*. Soon I was hailed in a familiar South Street twang.

"Captain, don't you want to be relieved of your guests? You must be short of provisions"

I heard Captain Potter chuckle behind me.

"There's your chance to get to New York ahead of us" said I, turning to him. It was a smooth day on the water, with little prospect of wind.

"Do you want to be rid of us, Captain?" he asked.

"No, sir" said I emphatically.

"Then we'll stay aboard, if you don't mind, and reach New York when you do"

I hailed the steamer again. "We need no assistance, thank you. Please report us all well, and inform the steamship company"

The *Energie* went on about her business, and soon passed out of sight ahead. Late in the afternoon a fresh breeze sprang up unexpectedly from a little to the eastward of north; a breeze that was destined to carry us all the way to harbour. We braced the yards around to starboard, set every rag of sail, and laid a course for Sandy Hook with the wind a couple of points free on the starboard quarter.

Throughout the next day we were running along the southern shore of Long Island, in smooth water, the breeze still fresh and steady, every stitch of canvas drawing, and the ship at her best point for sailing, logging some fifteen knots an hour. The days of the extreme clipper ship had long since gone by, at the time I'm telling of; but many a moderate clipper of the later years, with fuller cargo carrying capacity, but retaining many of the fine lines of the greyhound of the seas, and embodying all the best of their experience, could reel off a day's run that might astonish the nautical historian. I'll never forget that wonderful reach in the *Pactolus* under the lee of the Long Island shore. She was a trim and lofty vessel, lean and graceful on the water; a cloud of canvas aloft, she heeled at a constant angle, as if moving through a picture, while the long curl of a wave rolled out

steadily from her lee quarter, as she swept like a bird over the smooth sea.

At three in the afternoon, a steamer was reported dead ahead, some ten or a dozen miles away. Within half an hour, it was apparent that we were crawling up on her; and in an hour's time, we could estimate that we had overhauled her by something like five miles. I had a strong suspicion that she was our old friend, the *Energie*, but said nothing about it just then. Every one aboard was excited over the race, the *Santiago's* company no less so than my own. In fact, the young British officers could hardly contain themselves, wouldn't for anything have seen us fail to overtake her, kept running to me and suggesting this and that, or asking if the wind would hold.

Another hour of this terrific sailing brought us near enough to read her name. And she was the *Energie*, sure enough. I thought that handsome young first officer of the *Santiago* was going to fling his arms around me, when I took my eye from the long glass and told them the news.

"Hurrah for the *Pactolus*!" he shouted, running forward and waving both his hands "By Gad, they won't have the chance to report us this time! We'll do our own reporting"

"She must be foul—although these freighters don't pretend to any speed" observed Captain Potter, a little concerned, I thought, for the reputation of steam.

"She's making about ten knots" said I "And we are logging fifteen steady, and sixteen by spurts, when the breeze puffs a little"

"You don't tell me!" he exclaimed, glancing over the side. Then he looked up at the clumsy old steamer, ploughing along a quarter of a mile to leeward. "By Jove, Captain, we're passing her as if she were standing still!"

Indeed, we were; the spectacle, from a romantic point of view, was an inspiring one, although it must have been a jealous sight for the German captain. But now we were drawing in toward the approaches to New York harbour; our race had been with daylight as well as with steam. For I'd promised myself that, by hook or crook, we would arrive that night. I scanned the horizon anxiously for a pilot boat—in those days the New York pilot boats were small but exceptionally sea-worthy two-masted schooners; and at seven o'clock in the evening, with half an hour of daylight still remaining, caught sight of one standing toward us on the weather bow. We came together rapidly. By this time we had left the *Energie* a couple of miles astern.

When the pilot boat was within a mile of us, I called Mr. Ridley and the mate of the *Santiago*, and had a private conference with them; gave them instructions to place all hands in position for certain manoeuvres, but to keep the men out of sight behind the bulwarks. Stepping to the after companionway, I sang out below "Captain Potter, ask the ladies to come on deck and see us take the pilot on board" They hurried up in a flutter of excitement, the captain in their wake. A glance

along the maindeck told him that something unusual was about to happen, but he kept his own counsel. It's hard to educate a taciturn Britisher to new ways, but the constant surprise of the experience through which Captain Potter was passing had begun to make an impression.

The pilot boat was now running down to us on the opposite tack, about four points on our weather bow. She expected us, of course, to heave-to and wait for her. We kept on, however, at a racing clip, making not the slightest movement to check our terrific progress. To add zest to the game, the wind puffed substantially at that moment, sending us through the water with a rush really magnificent.

I could see that, on board the pilot boat, they didn't know what to make of it. As we drew up on them, changing the angle of their bearing, they shifted their course little by little, letting their craft fall off before the wind and following us with her nose. In another moment she stood directly abeam of us, less than three hundred yards away. With a gesture of dismissal, as it were, they hauled the schooner up again on the port tack, prepared to stand away to sea and leave us to our own devices.

At that instant, I waved my hand, and gave a sharp order to the helmsman. The men jumped from their concealment under the bulwarks; up went the courses like a piece of magic, down went the helm, and ship and main yard swung together, as if both controlled by a single turn of the wheel. The *Pactolus* came into the wind with a bird-like swoop, felt the main yard aback, checked her pace, and stopped dead in her tracks; there she lay, nodding sweetly to the slight swell, the last rays of the setting sun striking through her sails.

A shout went up from the pilot boat. They fell off immediately, jibbed to the port tack, crossed our stern waving their hands, and dropped their skiff overboard. In a few moments the pilot nosed up under our lee quarter.

"Good Lord, Captain!" he cried, as he came over the rail "What are you running here, a packet ship? I haven't seen a trick like that turned since the days of the Black Ball Line"

"I'm in a hurry to get in" I answered "and I don't want to waste time over it. I have a double crew aboard to help me. This is Captain Potter, pilot, of the British steamship *Santiago*, burned at sea"

Later that evening we took a towboat off the lightship, and clewed up our sails. I thought I'd be extravagant and have a second tug, since I saw another coming toward us; the wind had suddenly shifted into the northwest, dead ahead, and every one was anxious to get in. A hard enough tow it turned out, even with two boats ahead, for the wind soon settled down in earnest for an old-fashioned off-shore gale. I told our passengers to go to bed as usual; that all was safe now, and they would wake up next morning to find the ship at anchor.

At three o'clock in the morning we came to off the Statue of Liberty, and

dropped a hook into the bottom. They had passed us through quarantine under extraordinary dispensation, meanwhile sending word of the disaster and its happy outcome up the bay ahead of us. At daylight, the *Santiago's* company hurried their biggest tugboat alongside, stocked with emergency provision, if you please, for they expected us to be half starved. Captain Potter met the representative of his company at the rail; when they had talked for a while in private, I broke in on them.

"Captain" said I "it would give us the greatest pleasure if you and your ship's company would stay on board and have a last breakfast with us. Permit me to extend the invitation to this gentleman. Tell your tug to wait for you alongside until we're through"

"Thank you, sir—we'll do it" he answered heartily "Mr. Folsom, this is my good friend Captain Clark. He has treated us to a reception aboard the *Pactolus* unique in the annals of the Atlantic, as you'll be able to see for yourself when you go below. I'll promise you as good a breakfast as you would find ashore"

So the tugboat with her emergency provisions waited, while we enjoyed a hearty breakfast. I finished as soon as possible, however, and said good-bye to my guests; for a tugboat from my owners had come alongside in the meanwhile, and I was in a hurry to get ashore. Reaching the deck with my papers, I found the German tanker *Energie* churning past us, bound somewhere up the East River. She had already been discovered from our forecastle; all hands lined the bulwarks forward, laughing and jeering, waving their caps at her.

At my appearance on the quarter-deck, a group of three men, led by the Cockney boatswain of the *Santiago*, detached themselves from the others forward and met me at the break of the poop.

"Committee from the crew o' the *Santiago*, sir" announced the boatswain "We has to inform you, sir, that we votes your ship is a beauty, your officers is gentlemen, and yourself is a man we'd like to sail with whenever you're looking for a crew. You've treated us like kings, sir—and we're the boys as knows when we're well treated. We thanks ye, sir, from the bottom of our hearts"

I was taken aback for a minute, not being a ready speechmaker: "Well, boys" said I at last, blinking back a tear of emotion "it's been a pleasure to me to be able to make you comfortable. I can only answer you in the same words, in a way we all understand: if I needed a crew, I'd rather have you in the forecastle than any crowd I ever saw. You have handled yourselves like seamen under trying circumstances. And, well, I'm damned glad that I came along!"

I jumped aboard the tug, then, to forestall any further demonstration. But as I drew away from the ship's side, Captain Potter, with Folsom beside him, mounted the after-house.

"Now, my lads!" he cried "Three cheers for Captain Clark! And give them

with a will!"

They gave them.

"Three cheers, now, for the good ship *Pactolus*! And when we're cast adrift again, pray God she picks us up!"

You could hear the cheer all over the upper harbour. The Staten Island ferryboat, on her way from the Battery to St. George, changed her course and passed close beside us, to see what the excitement was.

UNDER SAIL

UNDER SAIL

I

It was at the time of New England's success and prosperity on the sea that young Captain Bradley took the ship *Viking* on her maiden voyage. In those days the building and sending forth of a ship was a community enterprise. One sharp November morning, the seaport that had seen her keel laid down the previous winter, had watched her rise on the stocks through the long days of summer, and had launched her successfully in the early fall, turned out to bid the *Viking* good-bye and Godspeed. Her crew was made up of home boys; Captain Bradley himself had been born and reared in the town. He had started out before the mast at the age of fifteen; now, at twenty-four, he had set his foot on the top rung of the nautical ladder. The town was proud of him. It was proud of all its boys; but especially of one who had shown such steadiness and ability as young Frank Bradley, the old man Jabez Bradley's son.

Perhaps Captain Bradley was a little proud of his own achievement. He could look back over a clean, hard record. In his nine years of seafaring he had not spared himself. Obey, work, learn, develop judgment and decision, be able to handle any job or meet any emergency; these principles had ruled his life, the *sine qua non* of old-fashioned seamanship. The reward had come unexpectedly. Captain Marshall, the leading shipowner of the town, whose fortune and influence

lay behind the building of the *Viking*, had offered him the ship that summer as she stood on the stocks.

"I've had my eye on you for a long time, Frank" the old man had told him "I knew your father before you, and you're a chip off the same block. I guess you're just the man for my new ship"

But young Bradley had already received too many hard knocks, had learned too thoroughly how to discipline himself, to be unduly puffed up over success that came in the course of a deserved advancement. His real pride, from that moment, was in his ship. She was the finest square-rigger that had ever been launched in the town, a ship of eighteen hundred tons, crossing three skysail yards. Her lines were those of the moderate or commercial clipper. As he looked up from the quarter-deck at her lofty spars that November morning, while they waited for the tide—at the maze of freshly tarred rigging and new manila running gear, at the brightly varnished yards, at the furled sails that stretched from yardarm to yardarm like caps of snow—a thrill of genuine sentiment coursed through his blood. His ship—and he loved her already. Soon those white sails would be set to the breeze, soon those strong, slender masts would sway against the sky, bearing aloft their press of flattened canvas, soon those new ropes would snap and sing, settling into a taut network from deck to truck and from masthead to masthead, whose every strand would have its use and meaning. Soon the ship would surge beneath him—his to control, to guide, to learn, to play upon, as an organist brings out the tone and volume of his instrument. His trust, too, and his future; at moments like this responsibility weighed with crushing force. The greater the chance, the greater the danger; the greater the success, the greater the failure if things went wrong.

"I won't fail her!" he cried in a rush of emotion "We're going on together, the *Viking* and I. By God, I'll sail her as long as she stays afloat. She shall be my first and last command"

Suddenly he thought of the face that would be appearing every few minutes, on this morning of his departure, at the southern window of a house in town. He could see the house plainly, a high brick mansion facing the bay. "It will be only a year" he had told her the previous evening "Then I'll be back, dear, and we can be married, and you can go to sea with me. No more of this sailing and staying at home alone; it's a miserable business"

She had looked up at him bravely. "Yes, Frank, I know. But come back safely. Think what might happen in a year!" It was the cry of the sailor-woman. She had learned it from her mother—and from her father, who had been lost at sea with all hands on one voyage when his family had remained at home.

An hour later, when, with all sail set, the *Viking* had gathered headway before the light land-breeze, taking her first steps into the world, Captain Bradley

went to the stern-rail and gazed back at the lessening town. He stood there a long while, lost in thought. He could still make out the familiar pattern of streets and houses. Home. It seemed to him as if he had always been either leaving or returning. His short, quick boyhood was already half-forgotten, like a snatch of another existence. Five years before, his mother had died there in the town; he had received the news on his arrival in Singapore. His father had vanished in a sea tragedy long before he could remember. No home for him remained, either there or here; he would have to make one. What was this seafaring life, that he had now asked a young girl to share? Every day he heard men call it a dog's life, growl that the game wasn't worth the candle. Perhaps so—but she knew all about it. She had been born in a ship's cabin; she loved the sea. And here was the *Viking*, young, strong and beautiful—what better? A fierce determination swept over him to *make* life worth while, even the life beyond the horizon; to give her a worthy gift, a home of love and happiness, all he had. Any life could be worth while, if full enough of love.

Glancing over his shoulder, to make sure that no one observed him, for it would not do to give his men the materials of a jest, he leaned across the rail and waved his handkerchief toward the town. She would expect it—would be watching with the glasses from that southern window. Sailor women saw the last of their grief; they didn't turn away and hide.

"I'll try to make up for the waiting, Grace" he whispered; then swung forward resolutely, to face the coming years.

II

Autumn returned to the old seaport, and with it the *Viking*, back from her first China voyage. Captain Bradley was welcomed with a hearty "well done" The voyage had been prosperous; the homeward run from Hong Kong had been made in the remarkably fast time of eighty-two days. Hereafter the *Viking* would be a favourite among Chinese shippers.

A month after his arrival, young Captain Bradley was married in the high house fronting the bay. That night he and his wife left town to join the ship, loading in New York for Yokohama.

Then began ten happy years of life. They were the last ten years of American maritime prosperity, the close of the sailing ship era. Charters were plentiful;

the *Viking* made money. Captain Bradley found himself a man of means. Without question, he invested his earnings in ship-property; most of the transactions passed through Captain Marshall's hands. Why not put his money into ships? Ships had been his life and the life of five generations before him, had made him a good living, had taught him all he knew. Most of his friends were doing the same thing. Few there were in those days among the old shipping people, who saw into the next quarter-century, who realized the nature and magnitude of the coming change.

One year, five thousand dollars went to build a new house in the home town. Every captain built a new house, whether he used it or not. Captain Bradley's house was occupied for the length of one China voyage, while Mrs. Bradley remained ashore and gave birth to a son, their only child. Except for this voyage, she accompanied her husband constantly on the sea. She had been reared to the life of wind and wave. In the *Viking's* spacious and comfortable cabin, they made their home from year to year. Their son passed his boyhood on ship-board. He was the apple of his father's eye. Captain Bradley invariably spoke of him as "my Frankie" with a note of pride and affection in his voice. Sturdy and manly, the little boy filled the ship with the interest and activity of childhood.

On a quiet evening in the trade winds, when Frankie had placed his mother's deck-chair near the weather rail and crouched beside her, perhaps weaving for her amusement one of the strange fancies of which his head was full, it seemed to Captain Bradley that life had brought him all that a man could desire. A happy wife, a beautiful son, a splendid ship—good times, comfortable circumstances, a pleasant prospect: in youth he had dared to hope for such things, but had not expected to see the hope come true. Now life had given him confidence. He would sit on the weather bitts beside them, dreaming of the future, of that day when their son would be grown up, when he and his wife would retire from the sea.

But the future, in those years, after all seemed unsubstantial; Captain Bradley believed in enjoying the present reality. A large share of the money that he earned he spent. He spent it extravagantly, spent it with a flush hand. In the China ports whither all of his charters led him, there were always a dozen or twenty American vessels lying in the roads. Lavish entertainment went the round of the fleet. "What's a little money, more or less?" Captain Bradley was fond of saying. "Times are good, aren't they? More will come" He was for ever buying pieces of cloisonné and rare porcelain for his empty house at home, silks and embroideries for his wife; things to be packed away in camphor wood chests after she was dead. The habit of extravagance grew upon him; he spent more money than he realized.

In fact, from a selfish standpoint, Captain Bradley was a poor business man.

Seamanship was his vocation; he understood few of the ins and outs of a financial order founded on usury. Its sentiment and psychology he understood not at all; these were considerations entirely alien to him. To his mind, money, to be clean, had to be straightforwardly earned. The plain transactions of a ship's business were all he needed to know. A certain sum of money put into a ship would, if she were properly handled, yield certain dividends: a charter at so much the lump sum, would pay so much on the voyage. Thus it always had been; thus, if he ever gave the matter a thought, he supposed it always would be.

As the flush years went by, he developed into a typical sea captain of the old school; a man of honour, of ideals, of simple dignity and original thought, careless, buoyant, at times a little reckless, a stern disciplinarian, a wise judge of human nature, a sentimentalist at heart, a believer in the inherent righteousness of things, a man of sincerity and individuality. Dishonesty, laziness, hypocrisy, he hated as he hated crime. Inefficient men found him a hard taskmaster. By nature and training he was arrogant and imperious; the instinct of command ran strongly in his blood. He spoke his mind at all times; he was equally ready to defend his position. His pride in his wife, in his boy, in his ship, in everything he loved, was enormous. In short, he was a man singularly adapted to the high and responsible calling of master mariner—singularly ill-fitted for his coming encounter with the world.

III

The first stroke fell out of a clear sky. Captain Marshall died suddenly, leaving his business affairs in a bad way. For three months, the town was in turmoil. At the end of that time, it became apparent that the old shipowner had involved all of his own property, as well as that of many others, in a series of disastrous speculations. No one hinted at dishonesty, but the hard fact remained. Ship property had greatly fallen off in value in the last few years; this, it would seem, had been the immediate cause of Captain Marshall's financial stringency. He, too, had banked heavily on the old times.

Captain Bradley arrived that year from Hong Kong, to find himself poorer by more than half of his modest fortune. All of his ready money was gone in the wreck; what remained was a bundle of pieces of vessels, quarters and sixteenths and thirty-seconds. Worst of all, the *Viking*, the one ship that Captain Marshall

had owned outright, with the exception of the eighth share standing in Captain Bradley's name, would have to be sold by auction to satisfy the creditors. In this crisis, Captain Bradley's idealism overcame all other considerations. "By God, I'll buy her myself!" he cried. His friends told him that he was a fool; but this only heightened his determination. He called the creditors together, and made them an offer. By great exertions, he managed to negotiate on his various ship holdings, disposing of some at figures below their value, mortgaging others, selling the house, and finally raising sufficient money to carry out his word. It took all he had; but he was glad that he possessed enough property to do it. When he sailed from New York on the next voyage, he was the sole owner of the vessel. His confidence, momentarily shaken by the failure of one of the pillars of his world, had begun to return. He realized that times were not what they had been; but it seemed impossible that the demand for sailing ships would ever wholly go by.

The next few years, however, seriously undermined his assurance. Freights were falling rapidly, were even becoming hard to get. One time he had laid her up in Hong Kong for six months, resolving to wait for a better figure than had been offered, and had at length been obliged to accept a charter that barely paid the ship's way. Steam was to blame for it all. He began to hate steamers with a bitter and unreasoning hatred. They were driving the fine old sailing ships off the sea.

Then, as suddenly as the financial crash, came the blow from which he never fully recovered. On the homeward passage, shortly after rounding the Cape of Good Hope, his wife sickened and died. She had been ailing ever since they left Anjer, but he had not realized the seriousness of her condition. They had already caught the trades in the South Atlantic; it was hopeless to think of putting back to Capetown. He urged the ship with every rag of sail, trying to reach St. Helena in time; but the trades held light, the elements were against him. For three days of nearly flat calm he paced the deck in agony, or sat beside his wife's bunk while she talked to him in a low voice, telling him of her love, of what to do when she was gone; trying to make it easy for him, for she knew that she was dying. On the third day, she died in his arms. That night his hair turned from black to white. He came on deck the next morning an old and broken man. The wind continued light and uncertain, there was no chance of reaching St. Helena in time for the last rites; and he buried her there in the deep sea.

That voyage, they had left their son at home in school. Alone now in the empty cabin, Captain Bradley's thoughts were much of his boy. He himself could stand it, must stand it. But how could he tell Frankie, his Frankie? Night after night he paced the narrow floor below, going back over life, living in the past from which he had now been definitely cut adrift. Perhaps he was not quite sane for the remainder of the passage; he could never remember clearly those weeks

before his arrival. But always, behind every conscious thought, lay the dread of what he would have to tell Frankie. This he remembered; it seemed to have been beaten into his brain.

Then a wonderful thing happened. He arrived home to find that the boy they had left behind had grown into a young man, had developed a strong and resolute character of his own. He came to meet his father at the train; the news had reached him already. "I did all that I could, Frankie" were Captain Bradley's first words, as they faced each other on the gloomy platform. His son looked at him steadily, fighting back the tears. "I know you did, sir" It was the son who put his arms around the father's shoulders; Captain Bradley had felt a strange hesitation, almost akin to shame or fear. But now his heart rose for the first time since his wife had gone. This was the stuff that men were made of. His son.

They entered the house together—the old Bradley house, where Frankie lived with his aunt when he was at home. Captain Bradley greeted his sister, took off his hat and sat down heavily. Suddenly the boy cried out and fell at his father's feet, holding him by the knees, his whole body shaking.

"My God, father, your hair is white!"

"Yes, yes, Frankie. That doesn't matter. Poor mother, poor mother!" He leaned forward to hold the heaving shoulders. For a long while they cried in each other's arms.

As the days went by, Captain Bradley found himself depending more and more on the new young strength. The two were inseparable; they seemed to meet on common ground. Captain Bradley was one of those men who never lose their youthful outlook; while the boy was in reality older than his years.

When the time came to sail on another voyage, Frankie insisted on leaving school and going away with his father. For the next eighteen months they lived together on the ship, at sea and in foreign ports, and their intimacy grew profound. They talked, read aloud in the evenings, studied navigation and history, discussed the mysteries of life and love; side by side they stood on the quarter-deck through storm and fair weather, and Frankie learned the lore of seamanship at the hands of a past-master. Gradually, Captain Bradley got back his grip on life. The boy had renewed his courage. He even began to dream of the future again—of marriage and a career for Frankie, no following the sea, but a safe career ashore.

Then another long voyage, alone this time, for Frankie had entered college to tackle his education in earnest. He had decided to become a civil engineer. This voyage was in many ways a hard one for Captain Bradley. Business was poor; he had a great deal of trouble with his crew, for only the outcasts of society could now be induced to enter the forecastle of a sailing ship; a succession of storms followed him, and at last he lost a foretopmast off the coast of Luzon. He had to face the fact that the *Viking* was growing old; for several years he had been

acutely aware that her top-hamper needed extensive overhauling.

As for himself, he knew too well that he had turned the corner of life. The voyage dragged on to its close. He reached the Atlantic Coast in the dead of winter. Three weeks of threshing around outside in the teeth of northeast snowstorms and icy northwesters completed the disheartenment. But at length ship and man, ice-bound and weary, passed in by Sandy Hook and made a harbour once more.

The news that met Captain Bradley seemed too heavy to be borne. A month before his arrival, when the *Viking* had been somewhere off the Windward Islands, running up in the northeast trades, his son, skating on the river beside the college, had fallen through the ice and been drowned.

IV

After a while, Captain Bradley gathered up the fag-ends of his life and started out in the *Viking* on another voyage. She was all he had now. A few more years went by, years of increasing discouragement, aimless and fugitive. Times were becoming very hard. The day of China charters was over; steamers monopolized that business now. The *Viking* became a tramp ship, they picked up what freights they could get, and the old ports knew them no longer. The vessel barely paid her way; operating expenses were retrenched on every hand, there was no money left for upkeep, and Captain Bradley saw her literally falling to pieces before his eyes. But the old hull remained sound.

He lived a blank life; but he continued to live, which was something. The old days were indeed passing, and with them the ships and the men. Sailors were not what they used to be; business ethics was not what it used to be. He began to feel as if the very fibre of mankind had changed. Nothing seemed left but memory and the remnants of an invincible pride. He could not realize that he had made what would be commonly called a mistake, in buying the *Viking* with his last dollar. His philosophy did not provide the materials for such a conception.

The day came when the old *Viking* was almost the last of her race, the only wooden full-rigged three-masted ship to sail out of Atlantic ports. All her lofty companions had passed away, or had been converted into coal barges. Her arrival in New York was an item of news. This was the one substantial reward of Captain Bradley's declining years as a ship-master; he had sailed his ship beyond her era, he had flaunted her in the face of a new generation. That compact made with the

Viking in her maiden hour had been no idle sentiment; it had been life's supremest dedication, and he had kept the vow.

A few old friends remained to him, though he had made no new ones in the latter years. These friends kept urging him, every voyage, to sell the *Viking* for a coal barge while there was time, while even this way offered for the disposal of an outworn hull. The coal companies were beginning to build their own barges. The *Viking* would still be worth some fifteen thousand dollars as a coal barge. He could retire on the proceeds, and live in modest comfort for the rest of his days.

"Never!" he invariably answered "Do I look like a man who needs to retire? She shall never be a coal barge while I live"

Yet it had to come to that; perhaps he had long foreseen it, perhaps the vehemence of his denial was only the face of pride set against the inevitable. On a certain voyage he had been obliged to run into debt, to fit out the vessel. The voyage netted less than nothing. When he returned to New York the ship was attached for the debt. There was no business in sight; the bottom had at last dropped out of the shipping world. He did all that was possible, but he could not raise the money; he and the *Viking* were no longer a good risk as borrowers—their credit was gone. The ship was sold at auction, in equity proceedings, and was bid in by one of the large coal companies operating along the Atlantic Coast. Captain Bradley, at sixty years of age, found himself stranded on South Street without a penny in his pocket. The proceeds of the sale had barely covered the debt. But his honour, at any rate, was clear.

"Another wreck for Snug Harbour" the word was passed, as he stalked out of the room where the transaction had been completed. But they reckoned without their host. That afternoon the *Viking* was towed to Erie Basin, to be stripped for a coal barge. At almost the same hour, Captain Bradley disappeared from South Street. The shipping world never saw him again.

V

A tramp steamer, dirty and ill-kept about decks, streaked with iron-rust alongside, came up the bay from Sandy Hook and anchored off Quarantine. She had arrived from a long and wandering voyage. When the health officer had left the vessel, the captain called the second mate to the bridge. An old man stumbled up the steps.

"Mr. Bradley, get your things together and go ashore with me. I'll pay you off at once. You old trouble-maker, you're not going to stay aboard the ship an hour longer"

The old mate gazed at his superior officer in silence. Tears of anger rose to his eyes. He turned away to hide them, walking to the end of the bridge. His cup of bitterness was running over. Frank Bradley, commander on the high seas for forty years, discharged from a second mate's billet on a tramp steamer—discharged by an incompetent captain, because his incompetence had been found out. He shut his jaws grimly, recalling the scene of two days before. Out there in the fog he had refused to obey the captain's orders; had wrested the wheel from the hands of the quartermaster, had held them both off with threats of physical violence, while he steered the ship himself; and thus had kept her from running ashore on Diamond Shoal. The captain's orders had been completely wrong. He had probably said some sharp things about them; it had been no time for mincing words. Touch and go—but he had saved the ship—saved the captain's certificate, too.

He stood at the end of the bridge, staring down at the grey water. What should he do now? While he struggled with himself, his eyes rose slowly, resting on a hulk that lay at anchor close alongside, between the steamer and the hills of Staten Island. For a moment he regarded her with a dazed and absent concern, trying to fathom the significance of half-awakened sensations. Then, with a suddenness that stopped his throat, his heart gave a great leap of recognition. Neither coal dust nor dismantlement could hide those familiar lines. The *Viking*, his old ship, lay before him.

A hoarse cry escaped him. Through the dreadful pall of the latter years, through bitterness, shame and inertia, burst in a blinding flood the memory and presence of other days. The shock passed instantaneously, and left him utterly changed. Facing his old ship, he became once more the man her master had been. Decision and authority returned to him, as they always did in a crisis; for they were intrinsic, in spite of life and destiny.

A rowboat was passing the steamer; he hailed it sharply. "Rowboat ahoy! Come alongside, and wait there for me" He crossed the bridge with strong steps, stood before the captain, gazed at him steadily, until the eyes of the other fell.

"I'll leave your dirty tramp immediately, sir. You can keep my wages—I don't want them. Take them and buy a book on seamanship. You'll need it the next time you get in shoal water"

"You insolent old devil…!"

"Don't touch me!" The old man's voice was level and hard; his hands swung at his sides. He advanced threateningly. "You didn't dare touch me at sea; don't do it now. I…" Speechlessness overcame him. Too much: it could never be put into words. "My God!" he murmured, turning away "I was master of a ship before

he was born"

Ten minutes later, seated in the rowboat with all his worldly belongings stacked around him, he directed the boatman to row him aboard the *Viking*. As they passed under her stern, he looked up at the well-remembered letters. They were dim now; time and weather had worn off the gilt. An afternoon in Hong Kong harbour came back to him; he recalled it vividly. He had been coming off from shore in his sampan, full of news; the ship had been chartered for home. Grace would be delighted. Approaching the ship, he had overhauled her with a critical eye, and found no blemish in her; then, as they rounded the stern, had looked up at these same letters. His Frankie had called from the rail, running forward to meet him at the gangway. Time and weather—the awful dimming of life. He bowed his head in his hands, and wept like a child.

VI

A stroke of luck was about to befall Captain Bradley. When he gained the *Viking's* deck, he found no one in command of the barge. Four frightened sailors gathered around him, taking him for their new captain. Piecing together their incoherent stories, he learned that the captain of the barge had been killed that morning in an accident at the loading berth. A hopper had broken loose, and had brained him as he stood beside the hatch. The mate, a drunken rascal, had disappeared on shore the evening before, and the captain had not expected him to return. The moment the scene of the accident had been cleaned up, they had towed the barge into the stream, in order to free the loading berth. There she lay, waiting for a new set of officers to be sent off from shore.

When he had learned this much, a strange idea came to Captain Bradley. It seemed a slender chance; but a surprising energy and hope had taken possession of him. He got the address of the coal company's shipping office, the place where these men had found their jobs; left his things aboard the *Viking*, gave the boatman two dollars to hurry him ashore, and went at once to the number on West Street where he had been told to apply. Luck followed him. He found the shipping office in a quandary over the *Viking's* case; they had no waiting list of barge officers, the tow for Boston was to be made up that afternoon, and the barge could not be sent to sea without someone in command. Captain Bradley told his story simply, showing papers that covered a career of nearly fifty years on the sea. His dignified

and authoritative presence bore out the tale.

"Well, Captain Bradley" said the shipping superintendent kindly "the job is yours. I guess you deserve it, sir"

"Thank you" Captain Bradley gave a wry smile "I think I can fulfil my duties. I'll try to give satisfaction, sir"

He had not told them of his own relation to the *Viking*, fearing the injection of sentiment into a business-like application. That afternoon he joined his old command, at forty dollars a month and all found.

He would not have called it a stroke of luck in the other days. How incredible, then, to look ahead, would have seemed the natural development that time had wrought. Could he have foreseen the end that he was coming to, he would have blown out his brains. But life had accomplished it easily and inexorably; failure had at last ground down the keen edge of his spirit, disappointment had rounded off the corners of his imperative nature. As he stepped across the rail of the barge *Viking*, only a great and pathetic happiness found place in his heart. His fight was finished. He had kept his pride at too terrible a cost. Now he gave it up, freely, gladly. Perhaps he would be allowed to die in peace, aboard the ship that had shared his better days.

Fine old ship—life had gone hard with her, too. The lofty masts and spreading spars had been lopped away; nothing remained above decks but the three lower masts. The decks themselves were grimy with coal dust; the woodwork had not seen paint for years. How well Captain Bradley remembered her appearance, when, spick and span from the shipyard, the best production of her day, he had taken her on her maiden voyage. It seemed impossible that a whole era of such intense human activity could so completely disappear, carrying its lore, its lessons, its origins, its very worth and meaning, into the oblivion of time. An economic empire had passed away.

Dingy, battered, neglected, yet Captain Bradley loved the old vessel—loved her all the more for the hard knocks she had seen. A sentiment that he had thought to be dead reawoke in his heart. He had not known, he had not dared to admit, how much he had missed her. He felt as if he had come home.

His duties were light. There were on the barge four men besides himself. He found time to clean her up. After every loading or discharging, he would have the decks thoroughly swept and washed down, and all the paintwork scrubbed. Later, out of his own pocket (he had no use for money now), he bought paint and freshened her appearance about decks; for the coal company, knowing that she would not last much longer, would provide nothing for upkeep. The cabin, the scene of so much that was sacred to him, he scrubbed and painted with his own hands, spending many quiet hours over the task while the barge was towing up and down the coast. It was a labour of peace and love.

For a long while the matter of sails gave Captain Bradley deep concern. The barge was rigged on the three lower masts with fore-and-aft sails, to be used in an emergency, when she had broken adrift from her tow. Often these sails would be set to assist her progress when the wind was fair. Smothered in coal dust, exposed to sun and rain, the first suit that had been given her as a barge was now worn out; the canvas would hardly hold together to be hoisted. Not that Captain Bradley cared a pin for his own safety; nothing would have better pleased him than to be lost at sea aboard the *Viking*. But the condition offended his sense of seamanship and responsibility. It was an indecency to the old ship to fail to provide her with the ordinary weapons of battle; and there were other lives than his involved.

At length, seeing that it was hopeless to expect her owners to furnish the barge with a new suit of sails, he began to save his money. In a year's time he had laid up enough to supply them at his own expense. It seemed like a touch of the old seafaring activity to be drawing up their specifications; he ordered thick duck and stout bolt-ropes, for this was to be a suit of real heavy-weather sails. When, one afternoon under the coal chute at Perth Amboy, he was able to stow away this strong white canvas in the lazaret, together with a couple of coils of first-grade Manila for reeving off new sheets and halyards, he felt that he could go to sea again with a clear conscience.

That evening he sat for a long while alone in the cabin. The interest of looking over and stowing away the sails had passed; he saw the truth now, saw how things really stood. Buying a suit of sails for a coal barge: was it for this that he had spent his hard apprenticeship, had learned and practised the intricate lore of the sea? He could remember greater triumphs. For two hours of grim thought he sat with hands clenched on the arms of the chair, facing the world's defeat without surrender. In his heart of heart he knew that he had not failed. He had kept respect and dignity, saved his honour, been true to himself through it all.

He sat on into the night; the storied cabin enclosed him as if with loving arms; slowly, as the mood of revolt wore away, his mind drifted back into the old days. He remembered how his wife used to sit there beside him, on evenings at sea, busy with her sewing; he remembered how little Frankie used to come running in. These things had happened so often, so naturally. But not for a long, long time....

Gone with the era, gone with manhood and success, gone with the further use of life's endeavour. The old man's head fell back against the chair; tears streamed down his cheeks and sank into his beard.

"What have I done?" he cried in agony. "I cannot understand it. What have I done?"

VII

Two more years passed by, and winter came on. It was the hardest winter in a decade along the Atlantic Coast. Beginning in the latter part of November, snowstorm after snowstorm struck in from sea in quick succession; one of those easterly spells that, to the mariner, seems destined to hang on for ever. Early in January, the wind backed for a few days into the northwest, and the harsh weather offered a temporary respite. Seizing the opportunity, three heavily laden coal barges, in tow of a powerful seagoing tugboat, set out from Hampton Roads bound for Boston. The old *Viking* was the last barge of the string.

The weather permitted them to get well outside the Capes of the Chesapeake; then it changed. Wisps of clouds gathered in the southern sky, a heavy bank loomed just above the horizon; the wind began to sing in the rigging with a low moaning sound. Captain Bradley, pacing his quarter-deck at the tail of the tow, plainly recognised the signs. Another spell of easterly weather was coming on.

They were already too far outside to think of turning back, and too far offshore to run for Sandy Hook. Nothing for it but to push on toward Vineyard Haven. The towboat was doing her best; a nasty head sea remained from the last storm, and began to pick up as the wind veered to the northward and eastward. The barges strained at their hawsers, pitching and rolling incessantly. Captain Bradley could never accustom himself to this motion, so different from the motion of a ship under sail. It annoyed and distressed him to the core of his being. Together, he and the *Viking* had once roamed the sea boldly, the man striking off the course, the ship leaping forward along it, bending to the wind, sailing free under the sun and stars. Now they dragged about at the end of a hawser, engaged in a servile traffic, trailing in the wake of steam.

Minute by minute the clouds piled up from the southward; a grey gloom fell on the ocean. The wind, now settled in the northeast, rose steadily, lifting the sea before it. The air grew colder, the chill of the coming storm. The old ship wallowed and plunged, groaning in every timber. She was very low in the water; already green seas were coming over her bows. Soon the night shut in, black as a cavern—and Gay Head light not yet in sight.

At six o'clock Captain Bradley went below to put on his oilskins and drink a cup of tea. Coming on deck a little later, rigged for the storm, he paused a moment beside the binnacle, as an officer fresh from below always will. In that instant, the hawser parted. He heard no sound, he saw no sign; but he knew that the ship was free. The fact was communicated to him through the deck, through the motion

of the hull. He sprang to the rail, and ran forward along the starboard alleyway. Abreast of the mainmast, he stumbled against the mate in the darkness.

"Hawser's parted, sir!"

"I know it. Turn out all hands, and loose the foresail. She's falling off to the westward—the wrong way. We must wear her around on the other tack, and scratch offshore"

"They'll be back to pick us up, Captain, as soon as they miss us"

"Not if they know their duty. It would endanger the other two barges; this is going to be a bad blow. We'll have to look out for ourselves now"

"Good Lord, sir, what can we do with this old hooker?"

"Do?—everything! Do as I say. Up with that foresail, now, and be handy about it. There was a time when you wouldn't have called her an old hooker! I'll show you what she's made of"

Then it was that the labour of love which Captain Bradley had expended on the *Viking* bore worthy fruit. Every block was in order, every rope was clear and fast in its proper pin. Unconsciously, under his training, the crew had acquired a measure of seamanship. They had learned to obey orders, at any rate; had learned, too, to respect and trust their old wind-jammer commander.

For the first time in many years, an emergency confronted Captain Bradley. He faced it without hesitation, filled with a certain fierce joy, sure of his power and ability. Almost before the ship had lost her towing headway, he had decided on his course. He and the *Viking* had more than once clawed off the Jersey shore in the teeth of a northeaster. They could do it again. Then, when the storm had broken, he would take her to New York, as if they were arriving from a China voyage.

Before the little foresail, the ship wore around sweetly, came up to the wind with her nose pointed toward the broad Atlantic, and hung there steady and true. The old free motion had returned to her deck, the old life ran along her keel. Immediately, they set the spanker, mainsail and jib; this was all the sail she had. The whole area of it would hardly have equalled her former mainsail, dropping its solid square of canvas from an eighty foot mainyard; but it was enough for the purpose, and the *Viking* answered to it. The gale had struck; the ship heeled sharply, plunging forward on the port tack at a three-knot gait. She made considerable leeway, but headed up to east-south-east. Captain Bradley knew that if he could drive her on this course for the next twelve hours, they would stand a chance of clearing the danger that lay under their lee.

Pacing once more the quarter-deck of a ship under sail, a tempest of recollections beset the old man's mind. Past voyages, dangers, storms, past conquests of the elements, thronged upon him at the call of an awakened vocation. Adrift, now, in a long-pent flood of creative effort, other memories flashed before his

eyes; scenes of love and achievement, scenes of weakness and self-indulgence, scenes of error and wrong. Life had always been hard for him to live, even at its happiest; his high spirit had ever been in arms against itself. He seemed to-night to be able to remember all of it—snatches of conversations, lights and colours, tones and meanings, touches of hands and the unspoken messages of hearts—all that had ruled his life and formed his character.

Through these recollections constantly appeared the figures of his wife and child. He thought of them deeply, tenderly, calmly. Once, when they had been at sea with him, the *Viking* had run into a cyclone off Mauritius; he recalled his going below in the midst of it, to reassure them. "How is it, Frank? Will it blow much harder?" "No, dear, the worst has passed" "Oh, Papa, aren't you afraid?" "No, my son, there is nothing to be afraid of in the world" He had said those words—he laughed, now, to remember. God had punished him well for his audacity.

He was surprised to find himself thinking of these things without pain. A change had taken place within him, a change born of the familiar exigency. In some inexplicable way, he was happy again. A task of seamanship lay before him; lives depended on his strength. He was a master mariner, in charge of his old ship—his ship, as truly as she had been that other morning, when, full of ambition and pride and courage, he had looked up at her untried sails. He felt her surge beneath the heavy cargo, rising, flanking the seas, flinging them off savagely, like a man striking out from the shoulder. He knew, he understood—that was the way he felt about it, too. A couple of old hulks, living beyond their time; but the spirit was in them still.

Unseen, surrounded by darkness, Captain Bradley stood upright against the weather rail, an indomitable figure, facing the storm. The world could crush them—never the sea and the wind. The sea was their home, the wind was their brother. This was the fight that found them armed.

VIII

The storm increased; the air was thick with snow, cold with the breath of Arctic winter. In the middle of the night, the foresail and mainsail blew out of the bolt-ropes. They bent and set the heavy new sails. Soon the spanker went, and was replaced. Captain Bradley was driving the ship without mercy; for the wind was hauling inch by inch into the east, heading them off toward the dangerous lee

shore. The *Viking* stood the strain; her seaworthiness had never been put to a harder test, had never shown itself so handsomely. She had been built in a day when work and honour had gone hand in hand.

The morning dawned on a wild scene. Great waves rushed at the ship, lifted her high in air, broke above her bows, and stopped her progress as if she had run against a wall. It was high time to heave her to. They lowered the mainsail, foresail and jib, and managed somehow to get them furled. The quarter-deck was comparatively dry; they had no difficulty in double-reefing the spanker. In his specifications to the sailmaker, Captain Bradley had insisted on a double row of reef-point for this sail.

To this tiny patch of canvas the *Viking* rode hove-to for the next forty-eight hours, while the storm howled down on them from the waste of waters. The decks were piled with snow, the ropes and sails were clogged with ice; slowly, mile after mile, the ship drifted against a pitiless lee shore. Captain Bradley constantly kept the deck. There was nothing more to be done—but he had to see the business through.

When the storm broke, they were less than five miles off the Jersey shore at Atlantic City—so close had been their call. The drive through the night at the beginning of the storm had saved them; without the offing made at that time, they would long since have landed in the breakers at Barnegat. The wind jumped into the southwest, the clouds quickly rolled away. They chopped the gaskets, cleared the ice away from the booms and sheets and halyards, and set all sail. The ship paid off, heading up the coast; from the frozen and snowbound shore the sweet land-smell, always a miracle to sailors nearing port in winter, came off to them. Night fell, the air grew crystalline, stars sparkled white and big in the cloudless sky. Minute by minute the easterly swell decreased, knocked down by the offshore wind, as the old barge crept northward. She sunk the lights of Atlantic City, picked up Barnegat, brought it abeam, dropped it on her port quarter. Then Captain Bradley left the deck, for almost the first time in three days.

He could not have kept on his feet any longer. The pain in his chest, that had set in the night before and grown by leaps and bounds during the last day of the storm, had now become so intense, at spasmodic intervals, that he felt unable to conceal his distress. At times it was well-nigh unbearable. His heart seemed trying to burst out of his body. Perhaps rest would ease the pain. At any rate, he wanted to sit down somewhere, alone, in an effort to face and compass this new development. He wanted to give his courage an overhauling.

They had sounded the pumps at sunset, with no result; the splendid old hull had not leaked a drop throughout the storm. But at midnight they found two feet of water in the hold. The mate, frightened half out of his wits, rushed below with the news. Captain Bradley sat like a statue in the big chair, gripping the arms, his

face white and drawn. In his excitement, the mate did not notice his extraordinary pallor and rigidity.

"Captain, Captain, she's sprung a leak! There's two feet of water in the hold already!

"Two feet of water? … Impossible!"

The old man heaved himself to his feet and stumbled on deck, walking slowly and carefully, holding tight to the rail. The shock of the news had loosed the terrible pain again; at every breath he drew, something seemed to be stabbing him with daggers. He sounded the pumps with his own hands, to find that the mate's discovery was only too true.

"What can have happened, what can have happened?" he kept muttering "The change of tack must have done it. That's it!—the change of tack" Now that he had found an explanation, he could face the issue. They manned the pumps at once—this was before the day of steam pumps aboard coal barges. But the leak gained steadily on them, in spite of all they could do.

It was a race with time now—for both of them. Captain Bradley gave a bitter laugh; he and the *Viking* were throwing up the sponge together. The breeze had freshened, but the old ship was pitifully slow. He swore to himself as he clung to the weather rail, watching the water drag past. He was thinking of the speed that she would have shown under her former canvas; twelve to fifteen knots, she would easily have reeled off with sky-sails set in this smashing breeze. While he watched, the swift stabbing went on in his chest, as if some invisible enemy were taking full and cruel satisfaction. Was he not to be permitted to bring his old ship to port? Was this final insignificant success to be denied him?

The winking eye of Navesink came in sight just before dawn. At eight o'clock, they were abreast the Highland lightship. The old barge was very low in the water, but she still retained a margin of buoyancy. With Captain Bradley, conditions for the last hour had been a little better. He had kept the deck since the pumps began, refusing to give up to a physical encumbrance; and the pain had eased away, as if temporarily succumbing to his invincible will.

Soon after passing the lightship, a towboat approached them, hauling up alongside.

"Barge ahoy! What barge is that?"

"*Viking*. Broke adrift from a tow—three days ago—off Montauk Point"

"The devil you say! I'll send a hawser right aboard"

"You'd better. Snatch us—up the bay—quick as you can. Five feet of water—in the hold"

"Perhaps I'd better beach you somewhere inside the Hook?"

"No—tow us in. I guess—the leak will stop—in quiet water"

Whether it was judgment or prescience, Captain Bradley's surmise proved

correct. As they towed up the bay, pumping continually, the water in the hold at first remained for a while at a constant level, then began slowly to fall, enough to show that they were gaining on the leak.

Below the Narrows, the tugboat dropped astern, ranging up on the *Viking's* quarter.

"Well, old man, where have you decided to go?"

Captain Bradley stood in the starboard alley-way, one hand grasping the rail, the other the corner of the after house. It was the only way that he could hold himself upright. In the last half hour the pain had returned with fresh violence. Since its return, he had known what he would have to do. The ship was all right now; but, for him, little time remained.

"Anchor us—at Tompkinsville—close inshore. Send word to my office. Get some men—my crew are—worn out. Bring off a doctor—for God's sake!..." The strained voice broke in a shrill cry.

The mate ran aft along the alley-way. "Captain!—what's the matter, sir?"

"Sick" Captain Bradley's hand flew to his breast, clutching his coat in a great handful. His face turned deathly white, his eyes closed, his mouth twisted in the intensity of the pain. For an instant he swayed; then opened his eyes again, and pulled himself upright against the rail.

"I brought her in!" he cried loudly "My old ship ... under sail"

The mate was just in time to catch him as he pitched forward insensible.

IX

The doctor came out of the captain's stateroom with a grave look on his face. The mate stood in the middle of the cabin floor, nervous and unstrung; he had been fond of Captain Bradley. The afternoon sun streamed through the cabin skylight. For several hours they had been watching the old man struggle for breath. The mate's gaze roved uneasily over the top of the chart table, where, according to his invariable habit, the captain had that morning spread the tablecover that he used in port, and had set out a few pictures and ornaments, to make the cabin look more homelike. He had done it between spasms of pain, while they had been towing up the bay; had done it for something to occupy his mind. He always tried to arrange the things as he remembered his wife used to do.

"He can't last much longer" said the doctor "His heart is practically gone"

The mate nodded without looking up. "Is he suffering much pain?"

"Not now. I've just given him another hypodermic. That's all we can do for him"

They went together into the stateroom. Captain Bradley lay quietly against a heap of pillows, with his eyes half closed. He had regained consciousness as soon as they had brought him below. As the mate bent above him, he opened his eyes and stared dully around the room. He was muttering to himself. The mate leaned closer—then drew back sharply, realizing that the words were only the product of delirium.

"Hello, hello! ... that you, Sargent? When did you arrive? Let's get a couple of chairs this afternoon, and go along Glenealy Road. I want to see Hong Kong harbour again through the bamboo trees.... Remember that day we had a picnic on Glenealy Road? You had your wife with you that voyage. My Frankie got tired: I had to carry him in my arms.... Frankie never grew up. No.... He died"

The mate shook his head violently, as if to throw off the mortality of the scene. He turned away from the bunk. "Why does the old man have to wander so?" he demanded sharply.

"The opiate" said the doctor "Don't worry—he isn't suffering now"

Captain Bradley regarded his officer with a long and profound stare. Suddenly, recognition dawned in his eyes.

"Oh, Foster!—what do you say? How much water do the pumps give now? Any chance of the leak drying up?"

"Only a couple of feet left in her, Captain. Four men have come off from shore to relieve our crew. We'll soon have her as dry as a bone, sir"

"No use" Captain Bradley rolled his head on the pillow "You'll find her larboard strake started—port side of the keel. She's finished. She'll have to go to the junk heap now" He lay quiet a moment, thinking. "If I had my way, she should be towed to sea, and sunk in deep water. I ought to go along with her.... But I suppose she's worth a few dollars as junk" Suddenly he sat up in bed, threw off the clothes, and raised his clenched hands above his head. "Oh, my God!" he screamed "I've been working all my life, and I haven't a few dollars to redeem my old ship!"

"Lie down, Captain. You must keep quiet. Lie down, sir. You'll feel better in a little while"

"Yes, yes" The paroxysm passed; the old man fell back exhausted. Again his mind wandered; he seemed to be sinking off into a doze. Like a child at the end of the day, half way between sleeping and waking, he babbled of endeavours on the playground of the world.

"After that typhoon, I rigged a jury rudder and brought her into Manila.... Oh, yes, they said it was.... You wouldn't expect an accident in the trade winds. The fore-topmast went at the head of the lower mast, carrying the jibboom with

it; but in a couple of weeks you couldn't have told that anything had happened.... Pleasant weather, pleasant weather.... I looked up, and saw his green light almost hanging over my bow.... Funny, isn't it, how things come round?..."

Gradually he stopped muttering. The doctor took his pulse, then beckoned the mate to follow him into the cabin. "It can't be long now" he whispered "Who was the old fellow, anyway? He seems to have a strange assortment on his mind"

"I don't know much about him. He was a fine man.... Say, you stand in the door, there, and tell me when he's finished. I can't bear to watch him any longer"

They had been waiting some time in silence, when a quick movement in the bunk started them running toward the stateroom. Captain Bradley was sitting up in bed again. All trace of pain had left his features. His hands lay quietly on the coverlet, his eyes were fixed on something far away. The faint shadow of a smile crossed his face, illuminating it with an expression of wisdom and serenity.

"Grace! Frankie! *Under sail!*" he cried in a loud voice—then settled slowly back among the pillows.

When they reached him, the old man was dead.

ANJER

ANJER

I

"Do you see that mass of trees in the deep shadow?" asked Nichols, pointing toward the shore "There's a house behind them—the old consulate bungalow. Years ago, when the China trade was flourishing, all ships used to stop at Anjer for mail and orders; for this reason, I suppose, our government used to keep a consul here, though he wasn't much but a postmaster. Anjer was the first port of call after the long outward passage; every man who has sailed to the East remembers it with affection. You crossed the Indian Ocean in the 'roaring forties' then swung abruptly north through the southeast trades. At length, one morning, fresh from a three months' chase of the empty horizon, you sighted Java Head, that black old

foreland looming out of the water like a gigantic sperm whale; and before the day had gone, you'd entered the Straits of Sunda, with Java to starboard, close aboard, and Sumatra in the distance to port; had passed Princess Island, sighted and drawn abreast of Krakatoa, taken your cross-bearings on the Button and the Cap, turned off at Twart-the-Way; and, toward sunset, had drifted into Anjer Roads, before the last puffs of the sea-breeze.

"You had reached the land again. Reached it?—you'd plunged into its very heart. And such a heart—and such a land. The Gateway of the East, the Portal of the Dawn—a scene of love and longing, the ecstasy of life, rich with tumultuous growth, and charged with the passionate odour of blooming flowers. You had come to it from the ocean, remember; from wide expanses of waste and emptiness, from the high sky and the brooding night and the homeless wind, from the mental standpoint of one who had forgotten his measure of comparison, who had lost his grip on reality. The very strangeness of the limited and circumscribed sea, with shores on every hand, with mountains piling the whole horizon, inspired a sensation of wonder and curiosity, as if this had been your first view of the terrestrial world. But ere this sensation, the breaking of the sea-habit, the shortening of the focus, the opening of the door, had fairly possessed you, other allurements were striving for the mastery. There was the hand of the East, held out in alien greeting; there was the breath of romance in the nostrils, the call of love in the heart, the smells, the voices, the colours, the whisper of adventure, the touch of magic and mystery. All this, in the old days, was meant to you by Anjer, by that cluster of bamboo houses beyond the fringe of the banyan trees, that point, that lighthouse, those hills climbing the eastern sky, and this secluded anchorage, where we happened to drift before the tide—deserted now, as you see it, and quite forgotten, but once the toll-keeper of the sailing fleets of the world"

Nichols waved a hand.

"What about the old consulate bungalow?" someone asked,

"Oh, yes; I'll tell you" The captain of the *Omega* pulled himself up abruptly "I knew it first as a boy before the mast. My maiden voyage was made into the East; I came to Anjer, saw the native dugouts gather around the ship, examined their wares of fruit and birds and monkeys, rolls of painted cloth and wonderful shells; I saw the consul's boat bring off the old tin post-box that visited every ship calling at Anjer—it disgorged for my delight, I remember, a letter from my mother, the first home letter that I had ever received at sea; and later in the day, I pulled bow oar in the captain's, boat when he went ashore to pay the consul a social call. From that time onward, hardly a year passed that I didn't see the consulate bungalow. When I became master of a vessel, I always used to go ashore and visit the place; it's beautifully situated among palm trees, with an open view of the roadstead and a winding path leading up from the landing. Old Reardon was

glad to see a fellow countryman; we'd have a drink or two, chat for an hour over some month-old piece of news that had just reached this outpost of civilization; then part for another interval, he to hold the lodge of the Orient, I to continue an endless pilgrimage.

"Yes, I felt that I knew the consulate bungalow of Anjer pretty well. But, in these quick lands, a house is a mere incident, is nothing but its inhabitants; and my familiarity with this structure in Reardon's time didn't exactly prepare me for what I was afterwards to meet between its walls.... And now I'll have to begin at the beginning"

II

He waited so long in silence that we began to grow impatient. A faint evening breeze drew across the water, bringing the heavy scent of the land. Above the Anjer hills hung a full golden moon, beneath which, in vague, translucent shadow, the shores of Java seemed sunk in an enchanted calm.

"I was wondering whether I could show you the sort of man Bert Mackay was" Nichols resumed suddenly "It's difficult enough to lay down the lines of any human being; and Bert was a doubly complex subject, chiefly, perhaps, because the key to his nature was so simple. Simplicity seems the most erratic of qualities to a world trained in suppression and negation. He was one of those startling fellows whom people instinctively like, but daren't approve of. He was brilliant but not entirely well balanced, let us put it; as primitive a soul as I've ever come in contact with. In fact, he was really wild, like nature—didn't attempt to pause or reckon, but let life come and go; and like nature, too, his growth was a series of instinctive processes. A man of the open, swift-minded, magnetic, and sincere, he was a tremendous vital force, stirring life violently wherever he touched it; while a romantic conscience, which plunged him into moods of contrition and despair, seemed to bring him out of every experience with a clear eye and an innocence apparently unimpaired.

"You can imagine, with all this, that his way with women was rash, sudden, appalling, and awfully fascinating. He couldn't talk well, but had a presence and manner that spoke for him louder than words. He was tall and dark and virile, a devilishly handsome chap. In fact, he possessed the secret of power that can't be cultivated or affected, the emanation of love, a glorious and terrible inheritance.

Something quite different, you know, from any trace of carnality; he wasn't a sensual man at all. He broke many hearts, I'm afraid; how, in the ordinary course of life and days, could it have been otherwise? I used to warn him to watch out; to tell him that some day, in a stroke of divine retribution, his own heart would be broken past mending.

"'I hope so, Nichols!' he used to fling out, with the serious gaiety that was one of his most charming characteristics 'You can't imagine what a lost soul I am. Nothing else will save me'

"I'd known Bert Mackay since college days, when for a couple of years we had roomed together and established one of the priceless understandings of life. The affection that lay between us was closer than that of brothers, close enough mutually to excuse our faults in each other's eyes. He became an electrical engineer, went to New York, and rose rapidly in his profession; while I, as you know, followed the sea. Every now and then I'd come to New York; and while in port, would move my things uptown and live with him. He was well connected, knew many groups of interesting people, and seemed, to my eye, to be living the richest sort of life. Our intermittent relation was an ideal one for two friends; our intimacy grew closer, as voyage followed voyage, and I supposed there wasn't an adventure of his that I didn't know about. But I might have realized, of course, that when the bolt of divine retribution actually struck him, it would be the last subject on which he'd give me his confidence.

"However that may be, I wasn't aware of any trouble, hadn't anticipated disaster, and was both shocked and alarmed, on my arrival in New York one summer, to find a brief note from him saying that he had gone away. He gave no address, and told me not to hunt for him. The letter was four or five months old. 'I am trying to do the right thing' he wrote 'God knows, I've done enough wrong things. Perhaps you'll hear from me again, perhaps you won't. It will depend on how I feel. I'm throwing up the whole game here. Something pretty hard has come into my life, and I have got to go. I must work this out alone. There isn't much of a chance—but that doesn't matter. The price has to be paid just the same' Then, after a few instructions about some of his private affairs, he asked me to forgive him, said I was not to worry, and assured me of his unfailing affection.

"You can imagine how the news took hold of me. The nature of the affair was unmistakeable; a tragedy of the heart had overtaken him—the fate that I'd often lightly predicted, and that he as often had expressed a willingness to find. Well, he was saved now, it would seem. I wondered.... Searching the past for a clue to this untoward development, I recalled his air of mingled restraint and melancholy at the time of our last meeting, the year before. I had noticed it only to put it down to one of his many incomprehensible moods. The night of my departure, I remembered, after we'd come in from the theatre, he had spent hours, it seemed,

on the couch in the studio living-room, strumming on an old guitar and singing to himself in an incoherent form of improvisation, a habit of his when he was feeling especially blue. I'd been trying to write some letters, and the maddening mournful sounds, with the notes of the guitar picking through, had at length driven me to desperation.

"'For God's sake, sing something!' I cried, dashing out of my room—he was a brilliant musician. 'But if you go on whining like the wind through a knothole, I can't be answerable for the consequences'

"'All right, Nicky, I'll stop' he had answered with a grin 'I'm a selfish ass, I know. But I'm not whining.... No, I don't feel like singing to-night' I realized now that, even then, he must have been in the toils of the tragedy.

"So this was the end of a comradeship all too brief, as life goes. Friends are scarce enough, heaven knows, without a fellow's losing one in such vague circumstances. But the years went by, and I didn't hear a word from Bert. At first, I missed and worried about him acutely; then, little by little, he faded off into the background, as even the sharpest details of the great picture of life do if we keep moving. Perspectives change, too. I continued, of course, to think of him now and then, wondering what he might have lost or found. But I never felt occasion to doubt the nature of his quest; he had come into that heritage foreordained at the launching of his sensitive and romantic soul. Something had called him down the wind, some note, some fragrance, some face of beauty, some revelation of delight; and he'd gone out to find the answer and consummation—love or death—that hearts like his pursue"

III

Nichols reached for a cigar. "Ten years and more had gone by" he went on slowly "when, one voyage, I reached the Straits of Sunda, bound for Hong Kong and Amoy. The southwest monsoon was on the point of breaking; for several days we'd been treated to baffling winds. It was in the latter part of the afternoon that, favoured by an unexpected slant of offshore wind, I managed to fetch the anchorage here, slipped into Anjer Roads with quite a rush, and dropped my anchor in a berth abreast of the landing. I hadn't been through Sunda for a couple of years.

"The first boat that came off from shore—Reardon's old whaleboat—brought me disappointing news. Reardon himself, it seemed, had been transferred to

Batavia the year before, and the consulate had been discontinued; my letters, if any had been sent to Anjer, were being held in Batavia or Singapore. Old Sa-lee, Reardon's boatswain, was still in charge of the boat, but seemed to be merely following a lifelong habit in coming off to every ship that called. He wanted to see his old friends, to gossip, and to bemoan the decline of human institutions. While we talked, leaning across the rail, he told me in the course of conversation that, some time after Reardon had left Anjer, the consulate bungalow had been occupied by a stranger. The fact wasn't of sufficient interest to me just then to elicit an inquiry. I had just reached the realization, with a shock of deep regret, that Anjer the beautiful had taken its place with the rest of the world's lost glories, that another page in the romantic annals of seafaring had closed.

"The air was hot and heavy that evening—one of those nights of threatening showers that never come. After supper, I had settled myself morosely in a deck-chair; it seemed quite unaccountable not to be going ashore in this familiar situation. The moon was high and full above the hills, as it is to-night, but clouded by a faint mist like descending veils of dew. The ship seemed resting after the long passage; on the forecastle-head a couple of men were singing, accompanied by an old accordion. Across the water, as if in answer, floated the voices of natives somewhere in the jungle, lifted in wild and startling melodies. The same breeze fanned down from the land—the breeze that seems always to be blowing here in the early evening, filling the straits with the overpowering sweetness of bloom and decay.

"It must have been quite late—the moon had risen overhead, and the singing had died out forward and ashore—when I first noticed lights in the old consulate bungalow. I at once thought of the stranger whom Sa-lee had mentioned. Who could he be? What misanthrope had chosen that house of solitude for his habitation? How did he manage to pass the time? It went without saying that he was a European; Sa-lee would not have mentioned him otherwise. I kept my eye on the light, which seemed to travel about, vanishing now and then as if behind a closed door. As I watched, my interest became more and more awakened. I began to imagine all sorts of people in that bungalow; a tremendous failure, a fellow who'd fled from the wreck of a tragic past; an exile, for some romantic reason or other, who had seen my ship in the offing, had hurried home, and was making ready for a visit, longing for the sight of a strange face and a word from the outside world; a criminal, who feared my presence in the roadstead, who was even now busy concealing evidence, sweeping tables, locking drawers.

"Suddenly it occurred to me to go ashore and satisfy my curiosity. Why hadn't I thought of it before? I called my mate. 'Mr. Hunter' said I 'send some men aft and throw the dingey overboard. Then haul her up to the side-ladder'

"Handling the tiller-ropes of the dingey, with two men rowing, I directed

her bow toward Reardon's old landing. Under the hills the land loomed high. You know that feeling of strangeness, of transmutation, which comes at the end of a voyage at sea, when for the first time you step from the ship's deck into a small boat, when you look across the water from a lower level, see the shore approach, and hear the hum of waves on a beach close at hand. There's a trace almost of apprehension mingled with it, the instinct of the sailor warning him of shallow water and danger in proximity. I felt it, a nameless tingling excitement; besides, I had by this time worked myself to quite a pitch of fancy over Sa-lee's stranger.

"Reardon's landing was already dilapidated; I scrambled up it and picked my way to the shore, telling the men to wait there for me without fail, for I didn't want them straying to the village. Striking the path at the head of the pier, I hurried forward, keeping myself as much as possible in the deep shadow of palm trees that lined the up-hill slope. I wanted to catch this fellow napping, whoever he was, wanted to observe his face in a moment of surprise. Then I should be better able to place him. The air under the trees was thick with the reek of tropic earth; sounds made themselves distinctly heard in the great silence. I advanced up the path noiseless and unseen, and in a few minutes arrived in plain sight of the bungalow.

"The little house, with its broad flanking verandahs, stood surrounded by trees and underbrush. It had a neglected appearance; even in the night I could make out how the jungle had closed around it in the two years since Reardon's departure. The light inside the bungalow was gone; heavy shadows filled the verandahs, so that I couldn't have seen a person sitting there. I began to wonder whether the tenant had turned in for the night; stepped aside from the path, and started to skirt the house, with the instinct that invariably leads a man to the rear when he's eavesdropping; and was about to strike across a patch of bright moonlight toward the side porch, when a strange sound broke the intense stillness and knocked me back into the shadow as if by a physical blow.

"Someone had begun to play a guitar on the verandah. The next moment a voice came out on the night, soft and suppressed, a voice like an echo, that seemed to lose itself in the silken chamber of the night. Either a baritone or a very deep contralto; but I felt it to be a man's voice, without understanding why. I listened, but couldn't hear distinctly. While I listened, I was conscious of an exquisite perfection of emotion. I seemed to stand at the heart of an old and visionary land, the witness of an ancient parable; the voice was the voice of Adam singing the first love song in Eden, and the veiled languorous moon was the same moon that had stirred that song through the untold nights of men.

"Suddenly the voice rose and swelled; I caught the words, the tone, the melody.... All at once I remembered—and knew, with a shock of recollection, who it was. The quality of the voice hadn't changed; the song itself was familiar. I'd

heard it often, as he lay on the couch in the New York studio, or sat at the piano in one of his wandering musical moods. It seemed impossible. How could he be here? I choked, in the midst of uttering a low exclamation—must have made quite a fuss. He got up abruptly, breaking off the song; I heard the guitar strike the floor with a hollow clash.

"'Who is there?' he asked softly, as if expecting a visitor from that direction.

"I pulled myself together, started across the patch of open ground, and came into the moonlight. When I'd reached a little nearer, I saw him standing at the rail of the verandah; he leaned out, showing his face—a good deal older than I remembered, but unmistakeably the face of my vanished friend.

"'Who is it?' he asked again, sharply now, for he had discovered that it was a man.

"I felt the need of making an excuse for introduction. 'Bert' said I 'I haven't been following your trail. It's just an amazing stroke of chance. That is my ship in the roadstead. I happened to call.

"He leaned out farther, a look of helpless bewilderment on his face. Then recognition dawned with a great rush. 'Nichols!' he cried desperately. Gazing at me wide-eyed, he repeated my name in a lower tone, in accents of simple wonder. Suddenly, as he gazed, the weight of the years seemed to strike him with a crushing force; he crumpled, dropped to his knees, and buried his face on the railing. When I took his hand, he gripped me like a vice. We didn't speak for a long time.

IV

"After I'd sent my boat back aboard, with orders to come ashore for me in the morning, we sat talking on the verandah till late in the night. Ten years of life had to be reconstructed; the astonishing thing was that I had found him even then. 'Of all places on earth' I asked 'how did you happen to land in this God-forsaken spot?'

"'Oh, I came up from Australia, about eight months ago' said he 'A friend of mine down there, a sea captain, told me about it; said the bungalow was vacant and could be had almost for the asking. It's quiet here, and yet a fellow sees ships and things—watches life go by' He had been pacing backward and forward, and now stopped in front of my chair. 'It's heaven!' he cried 'Nothing to raise a row, nothing to fight for, nothing to live for, much.... Nothing to bother—that is.... You

can't imagine how quiet and peaceful it seems'

"His words confirmed the impression I'd always had of his disappearance; yet, even in the midst of his hopelessness I seemed to detect a note of hesitation, something concealed from me—perhaps concealed from him, for he rarely analyzed his own reactions. I led him away from his story for a while, trying to fix the status of his existence. We talked of old times; he remembered them keenly, kept citing queer details, jests that used to amuse us, chance remarks that seemed to have lodged in his mind. Almost at once, his infectious laugh came into play. The old spirit was unquenchable. By Jove, the man wasn't half so hopeless as he would have himself believe.... I took my eyes away from him, looked around at the jungle rising against the hills; and all at once it struck me how closely he resembled, in essential nature, the land he'd stumbled on. A land full of the instinct of beauty, the gift of love; weary, too, and wise with age, yet fired with the undying youth of quick vitality.

"'Why don't you stay here?' I demanded 'Why talk of going home? I have a notion that you belong here. Why don't you love, be happy?...'

"'No, no!' he interrupted hurriedly 'You don't know what you're talking about' He stopped short, gazing at me as if he were searching my mind. 'Love won't come to me again' said he.

"'Nonsense!' I answered 'That's morbid, Bert. What possible reason...'

"'Good God!' he burst out 'Haven't I the right to know?' He wandered to the railing, leaned against a post there, and turned his face away. 'Long ago' said he slowly 'I took every ray and hope of love out of my heart, and took them in my hands—so—and crushed them, and killed them, and threw them down—as if I'd taken my heart itself and squeezed the last drop of blood out of it like a sponge. I tell you, Nichols, the thing's dead'

"'But you haven't told me' I reminded him.

"He took a longer walk this time, round the corner of the verandah; when he came back, he sat down beside me like a man tired with carrying a load. 'Do you remember a little girl I used to talk about?' he asked 'I think you met her once in New York, the year before I left. Her name was Helen Rand'

"'A slender girl with dark hair and brown eyes?'

"'Yes.... Well, she went away. She's got the same eyes now, wide childish....'

"'Now!' I shouted 'You don't mean—she isn't...'

"'No, no' said he 'I haven't seen her for these eight months. She's down in Australia—was then—Melbourne'

"'What have you been doing now?...' I began, but he cut me off sharply.

"'Nothing' said he 'She isn't mine—never has been' He leaned toward me 'But I've been near her night and day—as near as I could get. Ready to help, you know—anything. God, I had to be in the same place. But perhaps you won't

understand' He hesitated, then went on doggedly 'I found out too late that I loved her. I found it out just one day too late. I've been paying for that one day. And all I've done, all I could do, wouldn't begin to balance the account. I wonder whether you see?'

"'How could you keep it going so long?' I asked.

"He laughed harshly. 'I knew you wouldn't understand. Just because you think that love means faith and chastity, quietness, placid days and years, you have no eye for the love that lives in the fires of hell. But it's the same love. Bad as she is, I can't help loving her'

"The story, coming brokenly, by fits and starts, achieved by its very barrenness a certain grim intensity. The white light of his extraordinary narrative revealed a background sombre and hard, against which stood the drama of his ineffectual warfare, a play without hope and without reward, saved from inanity only by the tremendous fervour of his love. She had fled from New York without warning, it seems, fleeing from life, from him, from the scene and memory, perhaps, of that one day. He had a slight clue, but it took him half a year to find her. When at last they met, she didn't want him, didn't need him, wouldn't have him. This was in San Francisco, where she went on the stage again, and lived for over a year, successful, apparently happy, and growing more beautiful every day. 'People talked about her, you know' he told me 'She became quite the rage. Such a little girl, with serious eyes....'

She must have been clever, too, for she kept a good grip on herself. Soon she married a man of twice her years with a considerable fortune, and passed into another world. Bert had forsaken his profession, and had gone into journalism; he could have done anything passably well. One thing, however, he could not bring himself to do again, and that was to enter society. He didn't get on as a journalist—couldn't put his heart into the business of life. He told me that for a time he went shabby and hungry. Once in a great while he would see her, perhaps in passing, and they would have a few words together; but the occasions became more and more infrequent.

"'Then she left her husband, in the whirlwind of a sensational scandal. Bert missed only by the merest chance having to write about it for his paper. He sought her out at once; she had gone to an hotel there in the city, where she lived openly as the mistress of the other man. 'What are you doing, Bert, hanging around this town?' she had asked him point blank 'I want to be near in case you need me, Helen' he answered humbly. She gazed at him with those eyes that, according to his account, still retained their innocence—though it's hard to believe they hadn't by then acquired a trace or two of calculation. 'It's gone a long way beyond that' said she coldly 'I won't need you again' He tried to take her hand. 'I can't let you go thus, Helen!' he cried 'Let me go? You sent me' she told him.

"'What was the use?' said he to me 'I thought of the old days—they seemed old already; and when I looked at her, I couldn't realize that there had been any change. But it seemed pretty evident that she had left off caring. So I left her—but I couldn't go away'

"Some months later, she went in a yacht for a cruise among the South Sea Islands. The cruise was a long one; it ended, for her, in a quarrel at Honolulu, as a result of which she changed her second man for a third, and took up her abode in that glorious island of the Pacific where everything but happiness is supposed to wither and die in the magic sun. In the course of time Bert heard the details, folded his tent and followed her. But almost as soon as he landed in Honolulu she was off on another tack; for by now she had settled into the stride of her career.

"So it went on, year after year, from Honolulu to Shanghai, from Shanghai to Hong Kong, and down the coast to Singapore; a term in Calcutta, another term in Batavia; a year on the West Coast, Lima, Iquiqui, Valparaiso, she never resting, and he following in due time. It's hard to imagine what her life must have been during this pilgrimage; for now we know that she loved him, too, and that her heart likewise burned in the fires of hell. Pride, pride, what anguish will be borne in thy name! She had of course grown into a strong, clear-headed woman; only strength could have carried her so far. But he must have managed things very badly. I haven't a doubt that the thought of him constantly at her heels, the sight of him now and then in her wake, making hard weather of it, spurred her to the course that she had chosen. No woman respects a man who can't solve his own destiny.

"How they finally came to Australia, I don't clearly remember. They must have been there some time; he spoke of Sydney, of Newcastle, of Brisbane, and of Melbourne, where he saw her for the last time. 'I met her face to face one day' said he 'She looked a little tarnished—as if things had been going downhill with her. I suppose I told her so; I wasn't in the mood to dodge facts that day. She was angry at my comment—I don't blame her. But I tried to make up for it the next moment—show her what I really meant, how glad I would be—that is, that it rested with her to change everything. I asked her if I mightn't come to see her; she answered that it wasn't difficult to gain access to her apartment. All the while she was looking me over with a sort of amused scorn. Then she said something that was quite unnecessary. She said I didn't look as if I had the price.... That woke me up. I realized suddenly, fully, decisively, how impossible it was to keep on. Impossible!...' By chance, I'd been talking about Anjer with Captain Roach that very morning. He was sailing the next day, bound up this way, and I came along with him. Reardon leased me the bungalow; I went with Roach to Batavia, for he knew that the consulate had been abandoned. So here I am. I've got a little money, enough to live on. And God's being good to me—I've found a measure of

peace. Now you have come along—I think I'll be all right....'

"'Yes, this certainly was the place for you' I temporized, struggling with irritation at the mess he had made of existence. I couldn't but recognize the inevitability of what he had told me; but my heart kept asking, why is it necessary for men to be so selfish, so helpless in the face of results clearly to be foreseen?

"'Exactly' he agreed with my spoken word. 'This land has taught me a great lesson. I'm getting back my grip ... more than I hoped....' He stopped abruptly. Again I had the feeling of something being held back, of something missing from the story. I awoke to the fact that, notwithstanding all he had told me, his present spiritual status remained unexplained. He quite obviously *had* recovered his grip—but how, and why? It wasn't in keeping with the rest of the hidden years. And of course I didn't believe my own platitude on the influence of the land.

"'I mean, I'm getting back my self-respect' he said 'I'm really thinking of going home. The past begins to look like a sort of joke—a horrible, fantastic joke; but I shall leave off loving her now. Try to, anyway. I've learned....'

"I wondered what it could be that so puzzled me about the case. After I'd gone to bed that night—it was nearly morning—I lay awake for a long while trying to think the problem out. Why had he lost his self-respect, in the beginning? Because she wouldn't love him? I thought I knew him well enough to recognize this as the correct answer; he belonged to the unhappy company of men who can't support life when the ego is denied. But she had sent him away, at last, with a lash of the whip, with scorn that even his tried humility couldn't brook. How the devil, then, had he recovered his self-respect? Self-respect is a matter of human relations; it can't be drawn out of the air.

V

"While I tossed on the bed, vainly trying to piece this broken logic together, I heard someone moving on the opposite side of the house. Bert and I were alone in the bungalow. He, too, had been kept awake by the excitement of our meeting. Soon he began to pace softly up and down the far side of the verandah. I was debating in my mind the wisdom of going out to have another smoke with him, when his footsteps seemed to leave the porch and sink into the grass. In a moment I heard low voices outside, a little distance from the house. I couldn't make out

what was being said. Suddenly I thought that someone must have come with a message from the ship. I jumped up and ran to the window.

"My window opened on the patch of moonlight across which I'd come earlier in the evening. He stood there now, as if waiting; and, before I could speak, a woman came toward him with a gliding, crouching step, starting out of the very shadow where I'd paused to hear the song. As she drew near, he held out his arms; she quickened her pace, like a jungle deer, and flung herself on his breast, uttering low, native cries. 'You are safe? You will not go?' she asked breathlessly. 'Safe?' he asked, bending above her 'Have you been watching?' She looked into his face with a glance of infinite concern. 'The man stood beside me, as I was about to call' said she 'I would have killed him, but I saw that you were warned' 'Thank God!' he exclaimed 'You should have known—and gone away' She drew her arms about his neck. 'I could not go!' she cried 'I had to see you!' 'Hush!' said he 'Speak lower—you will wake my friend'

"She used perfect English, though her language was picturesque. 'Your friend? Who is your friend?' she asked fiercely 'In all the time that you have dwelt here, no ships have waited, you have had no friends come. Who is your friend that comes in a great ship, unknown and unbidden?' He smiled down at her. 'Dear heart' said he 'he is more than brother to me, and I have not seen him for many years'

"She shrank away from him. 'Ah!' she cried 'Then he will take you—you will go?'

"'No, not yet' he told her 'Not, perhaps, for a long time'

"'But you will go?' she persisted 'Some day you will not be here—and, for me, the sun will fail to rise, and the moon and stars will grow cold, and all light will die—and you will not be here!'

"'I have told you, dear, it must be so' said he. 'You knew it long ago'

"Again her arms clasped him. 'No, no!' she cried 'I cannot let you! You are mine! Stay here. It is a fair land—and am I not fair?' She touched her breast 'You will not look at me!' said she.

"'I dare not!'

"'Then look!' she whispered.

"I saw him take her in his arms. So he had found … this, beyond what he had hoped. Another wave of irritation at his heartlessness swept over me. I turned away angrily—then paused a moment, considering the true nature of the phenomenon that had appeared before me as if out of the sky. I felt that he hadn't sought this new entanglement. No, but he had evidently accepted it. Yet the woman had furnished the motive force, literally had flung herself at his head. Nonsense!—why be a prudish ass? It wasn't in the least a matter of morals; why persist, then, in viewing it on the moral plane? Incurable habit of conventionality,

never so strong as when we strive to be unconventional! Here was a meeting of instincts and elements, a transaction in lucid terms, according to a simple formula. It was a phase of God's excruciating biological experiment. She wanted him alone, and had taken her way to get him. He was receptive, for he wanted love. Could she have awakened love in him, he would not have denied it. Failing that, he would be forced to seek elsewhere. In the meantime, why repel divine experience? … But the shocking callousness of this experiment! While he dallied, detached and unconcerned, his life had been refreshed as if at a fountain of vitality. His heart sang with the knowledge that she loved him; he was happy, whole, and conscious of his power again. He'd said that he had recovered his self-respect—a curious choice of words, in view of the occasion; but now I understood what he had meant…. This had been her priceless gift to him.

"A quick exclamation outside drew me again to the window—could you fellows have kept away? He was trying to disengage her arms from about his neck. 'It cannot be!' said he decisively 'It is impossible! So, to save greater pain, I will go at once'

"She clung to him desperately. 'I do not understand' she cried.

"'Dear heart' he answered 'I have seen too much, and failed too miserably, to want the spell to fall on you. All that I touch turns to ashes; whoever enters my life is cursed with my own pain'

"She gazed deeply into his eyes. 'I am not afraid' said she 'It is for this I love. For what is past, I have no memory. To-day lives, to-morrow we carry with us like a child unborn, but yesterday is dead. What do you seek? Love? Have I not given you all?' She threw out her arm in a sweeping gesture 'My love will never fail!' she cried.

"'I prize your love above all else' said he.

"'What do you seek?' she cried again, springing away, confronting him with a savage crouching intensity. 'Faith? Happiness? Peace? All are here. My people will honour you, for I am noble in the hills. What do you seek? Ask, and I will give!'

"He leaned toward her, held her at arm's length, returned her gaze. I heard him heave a sigh.

"'It is because you do not love!' said she quite low 'Before Allah, am I not fair? Why have I not your love? Look—we are alone. See how I hold you, feel my heart here, behold my eyes—ah!' Her face was close to his. 'If love lay in your heart, you could not stand thus' she whispered.

"'Stop!' he cried 'You cannot see…'

"'I cannot see, my eyes are dim with love!'

"He thrust her away suddenly, as if in fear. 'Listen' said he in a dead voice 'For many years I have followed a woman who would not love me. To the ends of

the earth I have followed her, until I am weary, and heartsick, and must forget. I have left my home, I have forsaken my friends. But now I must return. Dear heart' said he 'if I were young and full of hope, I would not stand here idly, I would stay with you. But I have nothing left to offer. An old heart—broken—a brain without fire...'

"'I will make well the heart, and fire the brain!' she cried.

"He swayed toward her, met her in a brief embrace—then broke away. She gave a little cry. 'You will not?' said she 'I cannot ask again'

"'Dear, it is not to hurt you...' he began 'Why won't you understand?' He covered his face with his hands 'Oh, God, why can't I make you understand?'

"She pointed toward the house. 'It is because your friend has come' said she fiercely 'Never before have you been as to-night. Never before have you refused me. He brings you memory, and now you think of home. I should have killed him when I stood at his side!' She fell back a step, a savage figure, magnificently tall 'So—you have chosen' said she 'This which I offer, you throw down. What is it that you seek? What will you find? Is love so strong in your land, are nights like this, is happiness so deep? In convent-school I learned otherwise' He put out his hand; she drew away like a wild creature. 'No! It is done' she cried.

"A moment passed. He stood irresolute, the plaything of fate, while she devoured him with her eyes. Then, with a swift motion, she left him standing in the grass, and ran toward the shadow. He started to follow. She must have turned at the border of the jungle; I couldn't see her clearly, but she seemed to make a violent gesture, and the moonlight struck sharply on a bracelet that she wore"

VI

"Bert spent the following day with me aboard the ship; I had decided to remain another night in Anjer. We found much to talk about, but didn't approach the incident outside my window that morning; although I'd felt certain that he, not suspecting my awareness, would broach the subject. In fact, I more than once adroitly guided the conversation in this direction; but his mouth was closed. This gave me both alarm and satisfaction; at least, he took the affair with the seriousness that it deserved.

"Late in the afternoon, as we sat here under a little patch of awning spread from the spanker boom, we sighted a small barque to the westward, coming up the

straits. She'd just appeared beyond the lower point, some three or four miles distant. Watching her idly through the glass—-I had a powerful telescope—I seemed to find something familiar about her; and a little later, when she had drifted another mile nearer, I suddenly recognized the craft. 'That's Halsted, in his little packet' I remarked 'Her name's the *Senegal*. You must have seen her before, if you've been here over six months. He makes two trips a year'

"Bert took the glass from my hand. 'I can't remember' said he after a moment's scrutiny 'Ships look all alike to me. Where has she come from? You seem to know about her'

"'Why, Australia, of course!' I exclaimed, suddenly remembering his own point of departure for Anjer 'You must have seen this little barque in Melbourne, if you were familiar with the waterfront. Halsted runs a sort of packet service from there to Singapore'

"'Halsted, Halsted' said Bert 'No, I think I've never met anyone of that name—certainly not there. Look, Nichols, he seems to have run into a strip of calm'

"'Yes, and that strip of calm will spread until it covers the straits' I answered 'I know the box he's in—he's just about an hour too late. There's a nasty current off the point, with a tide-rip on the ebb. He'll drift away from us for several hours, then slip back in the night, when he picks up the land breeze'

"After supper we went ashore. I planned to sail in the morning, but should be down the China Sea again in three months' time. Bert had promised to make his arrangements in the meanwhile, and to leave Anjer with me on my return. I'd urged him to come at once, and would have waited a day or two longer, but he wouldn't listen to it. It was another calm, hazy evening, with no wind on the water, but a faint languorous breeze among the palms. We sat on the verandah planning the future, if you please; he seemed to want to talk about the world, and I felt it best to encourage the inclination.

"'Well, old man' said he at last 'I've got to turn in. I'm weary to the bone—didn't sleep well last night, at all. This has been an exciting time for me, you know'

"'Go ahead, and leave me here to finish out my smoke' I answered 'I'll be all right—I know my way about'

"To tell the truth, I welcomed the opportunity to sit for a while alone, in the midst of the luminous night, close to the land. Perhaps I might achieve the hint of a solution; I was baffled and pained by the tremendous vital difficulties I'd observed. The wind had risen; it swept down the hillside in a solid breath of sweetness, softly clashing together the broad leaves of the palms. Halsted, it occurred to me in a wandering moment, would now be creeping up under the lee of the land. I drew my chair to the edge of the verandah. The scene of the previous night stood vividly

before me; I couldn't keep my eyes away from that region of heavy shadow, where she stood at my elbow undecided whether to kill me or let me go. Suddenly I started; was there a movement in the shadow? I watched it narrowly—-and, by Jove, in a moment she actually materialized there, as if in answer to my thoughts; advanced, became substantial, and moved into the moonlight, coming swiftly in my direction. I remained seated, chained to my chair. She came to the railing and put her hand lightly on my arm, as if administering caution. Her eyes were level with mine.

"'I must see you' said she in a repressed voice 'I have waited for him to go'

"'Me?' I exclaimed, for my first thought had been that she'd mistaken the figure on the verandah 'What do you want of me?'

"'Like you, I am his friend' she answered simply.

"'Yes?...' I parried. Face to face with her, I saw how beautiful she was. She had the golden Malay skin, dusky, full, smooth as dark marble; across her brow she wore an ornament of ivory and carved blackwood; her breast was bare in a long slit, shadowed like the face of a quiet pool. The moonlight revealed her, the jungle stood at her back: and through her hand on my arm I felt the blood of the East, rustling like water in the hills after a tropical rain.

"I stood up abruptly. 'All are his friends' said I. She lifted her eyebrows. 'Has it been thus?' she asked with meaning. I nodded, marvelling meanwhile at her admirable directness; a woman pure as diamond, true as steel. She lived, like light, in instantaneous collimation. 'Yes' said I 'he has found many friends'

"She pondered the fact. 'But none have loved him with the heart?' Was it a question, or a statement? 'Many' I answered 'but none gained the answer' 'None?' she asked, searchingly 'You know, and I can only repeat what is true' said I 'His heart is given to one who wears it on a chain for play'

"She trembled at the thought. 'Where is she?' she demanded. I told her that I didn't know. 'Not ... home?' she asked 'Not there?...' She stretched out a hand vaguely. 'Oh, no' said I, relieved to be able to speak an open word 'Then it is not for her that he goes?' she cried, pathetically relieved. 'No' said I again. She leaned toward me, as if to make a critical examination. 'Why have you come, to change and take him from me?' she asked bitterly. 'I came by chance, without knowing' I answered 'It is the hand of destiny' Throwing back her head, with a passionate gesture she flung an uplifted arm across her eyes. 'Is she so beautiful?' she cried in a low voice, like one pleading with fate.

"I heard a slight movement behind me, and whirled, to find Bert standing in the doorway. He gazed from one to the other of us in troubled silence; then crossed the porch and stood beside me at the rail. She heard his step, and turned, a superb figure, her uplifted arm still shading her eyes.

"'Nichols, I'm awfully sorry...' he began weakly.

"'Ah!' she cried, her arrow-like candour tearing the veil he would have dropped. She went to him swiftly. 'All day I have wandered in the hills' said she 'All day I have thought of your choice. I have asked the forest, why? and the mountains, why? and the great ocean, why? I have held up my hands to the white clouds, to the sun of life and wisdom, asking why, why? Now I have come to you—and him—to ask you, why? My Love' said she softly 'I think it is that you do not understand, and your words fall without knowledge. You are the light of life to me, and the breath of the body. I cannot live alone. You have taken my heart from my breast, and now would carry it with you to a strange land, where it would perish and die. But these are words—you cannot mean them. You will not go. See how I hold you fast!'

"He gazed at her in trepidation. 'It is decided' said he 'When the ship returns, I am to go' 'Then I shall follow!' she told him. 'I shall go with you … home' He snatched his hands away. 'Oh, no, you can't!' he shouted 'It isn't what you think' 'Blind one' she answered 'would I not be near you?' He started violently; she took his lands again. 'Then stay with me, here in my land, which waits for us alone. Stay with me in these nights that never end!'

"He sighed profoundly. 'It would soon be over….'

"'When it had ended, we could die' she whispered 'I would gladly die thus, having lived for a time. Stay with me till love grows cold!'

"He pushed her off like one dazed and distracted. For a long while he stood perfectly motionless. 'Stay!' she whispered once more 'Be quiet—let me think' said he. She pressed against the railing. 'Look down!' said she 'To-night we live—but there may be no to-morrow!' While she was speaking, clear and sharp across the water came the rattle of a falling anchor-chain.

"He seemed to stiffen where he stood. His face in the moonlight looked sterner than its wont, set in the struggle that came hard to him. 'No!' he cried in a loud voice. The word seemed to echo among the palms, a tragic whisper of universal negation. She gazed at him a moment in naked terror—then tottered and sank slowly to the ground, uttering little stifled cries. I saw him leap the railing and kneel beside her; but I didn't wait for more. I'd stayed too long already; and what was coming would be harder than what had gone.

"It must have been fully an hour later, after I'd lost the path and threshed around in the jungle until I was tired out, that I succeeded in regaining the bungalow. Bert was sitting on the porch, alone. I dropped into a chair beside him. 'Too bad, old man' said he, observing the state of my white linens 'It was decent of you, though'

"'Yes, we're a decent breed, aren't we?' I snapped in reply 'Anyway, let's not balance a heart against an hour of discomfort and a suit of clothes' He turned his head and looked me over. 'I can't say that I blame you' he exclaimed 'But

honestly, old man, I think she will forget' 'I don't' said I 'Did you?' He winced, but I went on angrily 'You ought to know better by this time. You've had a double experience now—the chaser and the chased....' 'Hold on, Nichols!' he interrupted 'You're getting unpardonable. What would you have me do? Do you want me to stay here and live with her?' 'No, I don't!' I shouted 'I merely want a revision of life and human nature—no one to be unhappy, no love to go unrequited, no heart to be thrown away' He laughed. 'I'd like that, too' said he.

"The silence lengthened between us, as we gazed across the placid harbour, thinking our own thoughts. In the brilliant moonlight, every object in the roadstead was plainly discernible. 'I see your friend has arrived' said Bert suddenly 'He's anchored pretty close to your vessel. By Jove, that must have been his chain..' 'It was' I answered, musing on the fortuitousness of events that shape our lives. 'Now he seems to be getting a boat into the water. Where are your night glasses?' In a moment Bert brought them to me. Aboard the new arrival there was an unaccountable flurry, but I couldn't make out the scene below the rail. In a short while, however, a boat appeared out of the shadow there, and swam toward us through the bright moonlight. 'I wonder why he's coming ashore, at this time of night' I murmured. 'Can't imagine' Bert replied. Soon we heard the chunking of oars in the rowlocks, and two or three quick commands. The boat was nearing the beach. She passed for a moment behind the point of the jetty. Now she had reached the landing. A confusion of voices broke out, loud and jarring, pitched in a key of anger and violence. Then, cutting the stillness like a knife, came a sudden sharp cry.

"My heart leaped into my mouth. 'My God, did you hear that?' asked Bert, breathlessly. 'Keep still—it sounded like a woman's voice' said I. We leaned across the rail, straining our eyes, but couldn't see what was taking place; the landing lay too close under the trees. After the cry, an absolute silence had fallen. This lasted a full minute. Then a man's voice started up, the same angry, jarring tone 'Give way, boys!' Almost immediately, we heard the sound of the oars again.

"The unexpectedness of the occurrence had held us spellbound; we stood gazing at each other like two wooden images. Then, in the same instant, we found our voices, began to confer hurriedly, and started on the run for the centre of the verandah, where a broad flight of steps led down to the jetty path. At the head of the path we both halted as if transfixed. Someone was coming up from the landing. The moonlight plainly showed it to be a woman. She advanced slowly, stopping now and then, staggering as she walked. When she drew nearer, we could see that she was hatless and empty-handed. She walked like a somnambulist, gazing fixedly on the ground before her, now and then holding out a hand as if to feel the way. At the last turn of the path, she stopped and raised her head. Bert, at my side, made a low strangling sound. Evidently discovering us, she started

forward again. Her face was quite terrible. All hope seemed gone from it, like the dead face of a suicide that I once saw; her eyes stared at us blankly, and she clutched with one hand at the bosom of her dress.

"'Who is there?' she asked brokenly.

"Bert left my side and flung himself toward her. 'Helen!' he cried. She would have fallen, but he caught her in his arms. 'Helen!' said he again, with his face close to hers.

"'Bert?' she asked in eager fearfulness. Her low voice seemed to tear the heart. She gazed at him long and deep, while desperation turned to wonder in her eyes.

"For the second time that evening I fled the scene of life's amazing hazard. This time I hurried down the path with all haste, making for the jetty; by shouting, I should be able to raise the ship and have a boat sent ashore for me. As I glanced back at the corner, I saw Bert help the woman up the steps. I thought I heard her sobbing; but, in a moment, I realized that the sound came from another direction. Off among the trees, in the heavy shadow, someone was uttering smothered, choking cries. I broke into a run. The ways of the land were getting too damnably complicated altogether; I wanted to surround myself again with a safe strip of water.

VII

Nichols reached for another cigar. "And that's the way he found her" he went on "For it wouldn't be true to say that she had found him; until the moment in front of the bungalow when he took her in his arms, she hadn't dreamed that he was there.

"I heard the final chapter of their romance while we were going up the China Sea; I'd waited for him, after all, and had taken them both north with me. After Bert had left Melbourne, she had missed him, and had awakened to the realization that she'd driven him out of her life. So she discovered what it meant to her, what she'd been doing, and bowed before the law that through any wrong keeps the heart pure and the spirit ready to fulfil itself. She had determined to follow, but couldn't locate him. Some said he was in Singapore, some in Hong Kong; the consensus of many vague rumours, however, agreed that he had gone north into the China Sea region. It was familiar ground to her; she had friends there, and

sources of information. She's always known of Halsted's packet service; the next time he came around, she had taken passage in the *Senegal* for an indeterminate trip up the coast.

"Unfortunately, Halsted also knew of her. He was a beastly sort of character. The moment they got outside he grew familiar, and soon was making forthright approaches. She was the only woman on the vessel; the other passenger was an elderly man, to whom she couldn't hope to look for protection. She, of course, was a woman of experience, as capable of protecting herself as is humanly possible; but there are limits to the power of the mind over brute force, when passion is engaged. Make no mistake—her aversion from him was virginal, and nothing could have induced her submission.

"'I took my revolver on deck one morning, to show him my marksmanship' said she 'I shot a bird on the end of the spanker gaff. Then I got him on one side, and told him what I would do. I told him that I should be constantly on the watch, and that I would shoot him dead if he came near me. It was the only way—but I knew he was a coward'

"So this was the situation on board the *Senegal*—on the one hand defiance, on the other baulked and fermenting desire. Halsted watched her as a cat watches a mouse, trying to catch her off guard. Throughout the afternoon while they had been coming up the straits, even while my glass had been looking them over, the silent battle had been going on. The presence of the land had filled her with nameless apprehension. Then they had run into the calm; in this condition, the supper hour had arrived. She had waited on deck until she thought the others would be nearly finished; when she entered the forward cabin, she saw that she had waited too long. The mate and the old gentleman had gone on deck forward; Halsted sat there alone. She had to pass him to reach her seat. As she attempted to slip by, he rose suddenly and crushed her in his arms. The Chinese steward in the pantry turned his back on the scene.

"'My hand fell on a table knife' said she 'I fought him with it—succeeded in cutting him badly about the hands. The blood frightened him; he had to let me go. I've never seen a human being in such a dreadful rage. He swore he wouldn't keep me on board an hour longer'

"The rage had persisted; as soon as the sails had been furled, after dropping the anchor, he had put a boat overboard and bundled her into it, bag and baggage—well he knew that she was in no position to make trouble for him. She had thought of trying to attract the attention of the other vessel, but finally had decided that she had better take her chances on land. She had supposed there were white people ashore; at the landing, where her things had been pitched at her feet, she had asked Halsted the way to the settlement. When he'd told her brutally what an abandoned place it was, she'd suddenly lost heart. It was then

that we had heard her cry out.

"'Go up to the consulate bungalow' Halsted had told her 'See the lights? Somebody must live up there'

"So she had climbed the hill, trusting to luck, which had already arranged the scene. It might have been vastly different, you know. Suppose she had found him with the native woman? Well, suppose it—the renunciation would merely have changed hands. Inexorable formula!—for them, one or the other; for him, heads I win, tails you lose"

VIII

Nichols went to the rail, and stood for some time in silence, facing the land. "And I have seen the other" said he slowly "It was about a year later that my course led me again through Sunda Straits, and I arrived at Anjer on another evening of moonlight and stillness and awakened memory. After the anchor was down I ordered a boat to be set overboard, and went ashore in the late evening to revisit the bungalow. As I went up the path, the shadows seemed to start and move about me, and a wandering breeze stirred the palm trees with a quick rustle as of departing feet. I found the wreck of a rattan chair standing on the verandah, pulled it to the railing, and sat there a long while facing the oval of grass flooded with moonlight, the fixed scene, as it were, where the actors of this unseen drama had stalked through their extravagant business and said their futile words.

"Nothing had changed; I seemed as if I had left the place but yesterday. I turned to the heavy shadow where I had seen and heard her last, the shadow that must have marked the end of a hillside trail; and it wasn't surprising to me, but only natural, to see her standing there once more, her form drawn back as if from a sight she didn't dare behold. In a moment the tense figure moved. She walked like a tiger, with a crouching step of absolute grace, cautious yet unafraid. Crossing the oval, she came directly to the railing. I got up hastily, in excitement and alarm; and we faced each other without speaking for quite a period.

"'You?...' said she at last in a low voice, drawing back. Her hand tightened on the rail. She was regally beautiful.

"'For what do you wait?' I asked, striving to be calm.

"She threw down her arms with a violent gesture. 'A word, a message!' she cried 'Can you tell me nothing? Has he come?'

"'He is far away' I answered.

"She put her hand on mine. 'You are his friend' said she 'I do not blame you now; I see that it rested with him alone. But keep nothing from me. Has he sent no word by you?'

"'He does not know that I have come' said I.

"'Ah, I have waited, night upon night!' she cried 'Whenever ships stop, I have waited here—in darkness, in rain—always!—thinking to see you, or that he might come, or that a message.... Will he not come? Tell me!'

"'He will never come' said I.

"She drew her hand away, and stepped back sharply. Her voice rang out, fierce with hate. 'He was a child. The woman took him! Tell me, why?...'

"'The woman was his wife' I felt obliged to say.

"'Enough!' she cried. Her form became rigid, as if every muscle were stretched to the point of breaking. Suddenly she relaxed, and turned to me for the last time.

"'He is happy?' she asked quietly.

"I nodded—for the moment I couldn't speak.

"'She loves him?'

"Again I nodded.

"Her voice caught at the next question, but rallied bravely. 'He loves her?—you are sure?...'

"I cursed myself for having come—but there could be no kindness in sustaining the delusion. 'I am certain' I answered 'He will never tire of her. He loves her better than all the world'

"She gave a quick cry, like one who has received a mortal wound. Before I could recognize the significance of the moment, she had moved swiftly into the open. For an instant she stood with arms outstretched; but not until the dagger flashed above her breast did I see what she held in her hand. When I reached her she'd fallen in the rank grass, and life had gone.

"And that's the way I left her, a figure very beautiful, crouching low as if to spring, the tall grass closing over her, the mystery dissolved in mystery. Aha!—these high spirits, this gruelling difficulty of life. But she, you'll note, had solved the difficulty, had met it boldly and triumphantly, with the master stroke that levels fate itself to the dust. As for the others, they had solved it, too, though not so keenly, had triumphed, though not so magnificently—had gone away, had found their home, were happy, for a little longer.... What did it signify?"

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